

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C January 17, 2010

Readings: Isaiah 62:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; John 2:1-11

What You Want and What God Wants

Some of you may know that I have a Web site. And as part of my Web site, I write and distribute by email a monthly newsletter. Well, at least my intention is for it to be monthly—I miss some months. Some of you know about it because you are on my distribution list and, for you, some of what I may say may be a little repetitive. I start each of the newsletters with some question that Jesus asks in the gospels, and try to reflect on how that same question can be directed to us as individuals. For the November newsletter, I used a question from the gospel story we heard this morning—Jesus' first miracle at the wedding feast at Cana. In today's gospel passage we hear Jesus ask His mother: "**Woman, how does your concern affect me?**"

At first His question sounds harsh as Jesus refers to His mother as woman. But we can study and find that this was a common expression and not meant in a rude or derogatory sense. It is the same word used in Genesis when Eve, the mother of all humanity, was created. It is the same word used by Jesus as He hung on the cross and gave Mary to us to be the mother of us all. He said: "**Woman, behold, your son.**" Then he said to the disciple: "**Behold, your mother.**"

Words can be important to us. And so I looked at this very simple question from Jesus again: "**Woman, how does your concern affect me?**" Jesus spoke in Aramaic, but John wrote the gospel story in Greek 2000 years ago. It has since been translated into many languages. In English we have many translations of the Bible that are in use. The translation we currently use at Mass in the United States is the New American Bible. I thought it would be interesting to see how this simple question in our gospel story was translated in some of the other commonly used translations for comparison.

I looked first to the Douay Rheims translation which claims to be true to the Latin Vulgate that St. Jerome produced back in the 4th century, and is used by many conservative Catholics. It says: "**Woman, what is that to me and to thee?**" Other translations are:

- "**Woman, what do you want from me?**" New Jerusalem Bible; currently used by the Catholic Church in Canada
- "**Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?**" New Revised Standard Version; preferred by many Catholic Bible scholars
- "**Woman, what have I to do with thee?**" King James Version
- "**Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?**" New King James Version
- "**Dear woman, why do you involve me?**" New International Version
- "**What are you and I to do about it, ma'am?**" Cotton Patch Gospel Version. Not a true translation but an interesting modern day, paraphrasing of selected portions of the New Testament.

Eight different versions of one simple question from Jesus, and they all have slightly different nuances and connotations. It was a reminder to me to be careful when I read the

Bible not to twist one word or phrase around to read into it something that I want to hear. It is important to pray the Bible and let the Holy Spirit speak to us on a personal level and guide us in our lives. We can meditate on one word or phrase from scripture and let the Holy Spirit speak to us. But we must be careful not to build our own theology based on one particular translation of a series of writings written 2000 years ago. It is comforting to know that we can rely on the Tradition of the Church to keep us on the right track theologically. The Church relies on the early Fathers of the Church who knew the languages and customs of Christ's time. The Church relies on years of careful philosophical and theological study, guided by the Holy Spirit, to discern what God wants us to do and what God wants us to believe.

If we all simply pick up an English translation of the Bible and try to create a theology from scripture alone, we will come up with many different theologies. That is why there are so many protestant churches. They don't have the tradition that goes back to Christ to help guide them. Don't let yourself get caught up and frustrated with evangelical Christians who press you to prove your beliefs based on a Bible-alone approach.

But I have digressed. Getting back to our question at hand, I cannot be sure of Jesus' exact words. I do not know His facial expressions, His tone of voice, or His body language that accompanied His words. I can examine multiple texts and pray to the Holy Spirit and try to determine how Jesus is speaking to me today. It may be different for you. It may be different for me tomorrow. For now, I will stick with the NAB translation and pose Jesus' question to us: *"How does your concern affect me?"* And I can reflect on why Jesus would be affected or concerned by all my prayers, all the needs and wants that I bring to him each day. But then I am comforted when I hear the rest of the Cana story and see that Jesus, despite His question, responded to His mother's wishes. Jesus will respond to our requests as well when we bring them in good faith, and especially when we bring them out of concern for others as our Blessed Mother did. Mary interceded for the family at the wedding feast. She will intercede for us as well. She is our mother. And Jesus will not refuse his mother.

We have only two things to do. First, in confidence like Mary, we bring our needs and concerns to Jesus, either directly, or through the intercession of Mary. Second, we do what Mary told the wine stewards; and that is to do whatever Jesus tells us. I think we're a lot better at the first part, telling God what we want, than we are with the second part, listening to God and doing what He wants. Let God know your cares and concerns, we are in troubling times, but then be at peace and listen to what He asks of you.

Deacon Joe Hulway