

Archbishop Smith: Lessons to Learn

In the course of a visit to an elementary school last week, I visited a grade 1 class. The kids love to ask questions. One exchange went like this:

Student #1: "How old are you?"

Me: "123."

Student #2: "Boy! You must eat a lot of vegetables!!"

Clearly, the little boy's parents and teachers had taught him the importance of eating vegetables for a healthy life (and, apparently, a lengthy one). And, he learned the lesson; he accepted it and took it to heart. Given his young age, it is also clear that he accepted the truth of what he was being taught on the authority of his parents and teachers. He trusted that they would not tell him anything that is not true.

Three lessons are given to all of us in the readings from Sacred Scripture that we heard proclaimed at Sunday mass. They are given so that we shall learn them, take them to heart and thus allow them to shape how we apprehend reality and conduct our lives. They are difficult, and the call to us is to accept them on the authority of their source: God, who will always speak to us what is true.

From Genesis (12:1-4) we are taught to entrust our future to God. The exemplar is Abram, who heard God say to him, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." In other words, God summoned Abram to separate himself from the familiar, from the supports, from what he knew, and set out into the unknown, trusting only in God. The Letter to the Hebrews would later capture the drama of this simply and dramatically, saying that Abram "set out, not knowing where he was going" (11:8). Put in these stark terms, we realize that this is not an easy lesson to learn!! Much easier to live with the illusion of control and try to manage every aspect of our lives, including our future.

Lesson two is from St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy (1: 8b-10). There we are taught to join with him (and the whole Church, of course) in suffering for the Gospel, relying not on ourselves but on the power of God. This is part and parcel of being a Christian, a lesson that is increasingly coming home to us by the resistance to the Gospel and its messengers put up by contemporary society. Can we take this lesson to heart, embracing as true the fact that I, as a Christian, am increasingly a foreigner in my own land and ready to accept the consequences of fidelity to my baptismal identity? Not easy.

What does help us learn these first two lessons is the third, namely, that taught by the Gospel passage (Matthew 17:1-9). This third lesson is to accept the truth of who Jesus really is. At his transfiguration, his divine identity

shone forth. He is the eternal Son of God, who came from eternity to assume our human nature, redeem us, and be for us the way to eternal life with the Holy Trinity. He is history's foundation, centre and end goal. All that the Father wills shall be accomplished in him. Since this is true, how could we not be willing to suffer for Jesus and his Gospel? Since this is true, how could we not, with full confidence, entrust our future to him, though we know not where we are going?

Learning the lesson of vegetables might well result in a healthy lifestyle. Learning the lessons of self-abandonment and suffering for the sake of the Gospel leads to that health we call salvation. Lessons we need to learn very well.