

Homily
January 30, 2011
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Today we are gathering in an alternative way of doing worshipping. There are many, many ways to gather for worship. Taize worship, which focuses on singing, is one way. Evening worship, like vespers services is another way. One of my favorite ways of gathering is called “Theology on Tap.” Now everyone knows what “theology” means, right? It can often wind up being an academic and dry way to discuss God. But essentially, it means God talk. So, hopefully it is at least potentially *interesting* to most of us.

I was surprised to learn that Theology on Tap began in Catholic settings. The idea is pretty basic. People gather somewhere where there are drinks on tap—whether soda otherwise would depend on the group, I guess. Then they share some drinks and talk about God together. It is as simple as that.

I like the sociability of it. And the accessibility. And the fact that it is in a non-academic setting, and is out in the world. But one thing bothers me about it, and it is mirrored in this morning’s reading. It is not the theology part of it—I like to talk about God just fine. But I am concerned about the “on tap” bit. That makes it sound like God is ready to be poured out at any time. As if understanding God is as easy as pouring a drink. Maybe so on a good day, but certainly not always.

In this morning’s reading, Jesus seems to say that God is on tap through prayer. Ask and you will get, search and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you. As if grace was ready to be poured out at any time. Wouldn’t it be great if life were like that? As if we could just be straightforward with God about what we wanted, and –poof!—we would get it. Maybe if you are Jesus—but what about us more run of the mill humans?

Some of the Biblical commentators I read encouraged pastors to schedule plenty of pastoral counseling time around this passage if they chose to preach it. As if we are all able to get what we need from God just by asking for it in a world full of suffering, brokenness and ills. It defies reason, and worse still, it defies our experiences. It is just not realistic. Yet I think those commentators are missing something important. And that’s the wider setting of Christ’s comments.

Jesus was praying alone when the disciples approached him. So they ask him how to pray. They may have been seeking a special prayer to distinguish them as Christ’s disciples. What they receive is advice on how to be a church. First Jesus offers them what we have come to call the

Lord's Prayer, in an admittedly slightly different form than we use now. And he goes on from there. He goes on to tell a story about friends in need. He encourages us to give one another the things we need to get by. And he models persistence in asking for what we need. If our friend does not provide what we need right away, we keep right on knocking until she or he does.

Prayer is not a one-time event, we keep at it. Likewise, we keep at being in community together, even if it does not always go exactly as we hope or plan. We will receive what we need from one another if we are persistent about it, and if we stay in community. Or at least that's the model Jesus offers us, and encourages us to adopt. And he encourages the same behavior with God. In part because we need things from God just as surely as we do from one another. But also because our relationships with one another are intimately tied together with our relationship with God.

In our modern version of the Lord's Prayer we say "forgive us our sins...or trespasses...or debts, as we forgive those who sin...or trespass against us...or our debtors." We forgive as we are forgiven. We give as we are given. We take care of each other. That's the model for being people of faith. And, at least on a good day, that's how we live. We all have those off days where we slip up and give someone a spider or a scorpion when they ask for an egg. Or we keep them waiting and knocking when they are in need late at night. But we are all encouraged to be persistent. To keep at it. To keep knocking and to keep replying. To give bread or fish or eggs when they are needed. To feed each other physically and spiritually. To be church, and to act as God for one another in providing for each other.

And that's the good news of the Gospel this morning: we do God's work together. We provide for one another. We can, and do, turn to one another in times of need, and God is among us all through that.

Amen!