

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

I went to college with Evan Bayh. I don't just mean that we were at college at the same time. I mean more than that.

We were both in the IU School of Business. But even more than that, we had a class together.

And what's more, the seating arrangement in that class was in tables of three. Evan sat in the middle of the table where I sat. I was on the left, and a girl whose name I forget sat on the right.

So, seriously, I was in college with Evan Bayh.

If I met Evan Bayh today, I assure you I would not start out the conversation by saying "Evan, my God, it's been so long! What, 40 years? How have you been?"

I'm sure I would have to remind him that I sat next to him in Econ 420. The fact has probably faded from memory, if it was ever there in the first place.

I'm a cautious person by nature, but I don't think I am alone in not wanting to presume to make too much of our past association

I can resonate with the Gospel today when Jesus warns his hearers not to make too much of casual acquaintances or superficial connections.

They will do us no good. That applies in the realm of our religious practice, too.

Are we only casually acquainted with Jesus? Is the connection between us merely superficial?

What would it take to avoid finding ourselves in the situation portrayed in the Gospel where he confesses that he does not know us?

I think the answer lies in what might be called an affinity of purpose. We have to be about the things we know Jesus is about.

Even something so laudable as attending daily Mass or praying 15 decades of the rosary every day will not help us if it remains only an external behavior.

It has to lead to an interior disposition, what St. Paul calls "putting on the mind of Christ."

How can we determine whether that is happening or not?

One way is to steep ourselves in the Scriptures, and above all, the gospels. As we do that, we can ask ourselves where are the passages that we find most difficult to accommodate ourselves to, and what are they about?

A short cut would be to read up on what's commonly called "the hard sayings of Jesus." If nothing else, they

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can keep us from becoming presumptuous, as if we and Jesus are best buddies when in fact we may not want what he wants, or see the importance of what he finds important.

These sayings can remind us that Jesus lived a life of radical discipleship. He followed the will of the Father without counting the cost.

To “know” Jesus is to acknowledge that fact, to make room for it in our own lives, to recognize the challenge it entails, to try as best we can to respond.

Only then are we in a position to truly understand the compassion of God and the extent to which he wants to save us.

Without that difficult step we fall into the trap of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called “cheap grace,” the presumption that everything between us and God is just hunky-dory and couldn’t be better.

What God is looking for from us is an inner affinity, a motivation that has something in common with his.

We can’t bank on anything else, neither the Catholicism we were born into and share with parents and grandparents, nor the attentiveness to external practices that leave us unchanged in our hearts.

Discipleship that counts in Jesus’ eyes means discipline—the willingness to continue to put forth the effort to rid ourselves of anything that does not align with God’s will.

We can’t afford to do otherwise. Our pet projects or opinions can leave us on the outside looking in unless they are truly motivated by the Spirit of the Lord.

We dare not forget that if we want to be among those who find their way through the narrow door and into the kingdom God has prepared for us.

As we approach the Eucharistic table we give thanks for the opportunity it presents to align our lives with Christ’s paschal mystery, that we might be his witnesses in this life and coheirs with him of the life to come.