

## “Don’t Believe Everything You Think”

- 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday
- February 12, 2017
- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

Each week I look forward more than anything else to walking around Green Lake very early, even in the dark, rain or clear, Saturday and Sunday mornings. It’s a 2.8 mile path around still water. I call it my “Think Pad”. I conceive of it as taking my soul for a spin, my mind for a walk, the way you take a dog for a walk. All week long my mind is kept indoors, in its pen, confined to its work calculations as president: planning, preparing, posturing, presenting, presiding over meetings, etc. Then I take my mind, like a dog, for that walk around Green Lake and I let it roam where it will, sniff every bush, follow its nose, chase a squirrel or a duck, let it go where it will. That’s also where homilies come from, like this one. I should really call it my “Unthink Pad” because I unleash my mind.

The other weekend I had aired out my mind and was driving back to campus and came up behind a car at a stop light. There was a bumper sticker on the car in front which read, “Don’t believe everything you think!” “Don’t believe everything you think!” Thank you! That applies to so much, such as don’t believe you are not racially biased just because you think you aren’t. Don’t believe you have the most informed and balanced political views just because you think you do. Don’t believe you are not arrogant, just because you think you aren’t. (“Jesuit arrogance”, by the way, is not an oxymoron; it is “Jesuit humility” which is the oxymoron!) I would like to believe that at the very core of Jesuits and Jesuit education and Jesuit preaching is the practice of coming to an internal freedom from those blindspots so that we can help ourselves and help others to discern life choices truly and freely and well.

“Don’t believe everything you think” applies to the gospel today. Jesus—a deeply devoted, loving Jew, steeped in its sacred scriptures and learning who he was and what he was called to be from prayerfully exposing himself to them—says repeatedly in today’s gospel: “You have heard it said... but I say” again and again, about righteousness and the kingdom, about killing and anger, about adultery and lust, about false oaths and keeping one’s vows to God, about finding the true “yes” and the true “no” in oneself and holding to them, not wavering. He, in effect, is saying to the people of his religious culture, “Don’t believe everything you think your religion says or thinks.” Rather find its deeper truth, follow where it leads, seek its true intent, its fulfillment, its perfection, not how it is corrupted or limited in or encrusted by culture how it has you thinking.

I apply this above all in my adult life to what I believe about Jesus himself. “Jesuit” is short for a “Companion of Jesus”. Who the real Jesus Christ really is makes a difference to my identity both as a Christian believer and as a vowed Companion of Jesus. For years I have been applying to my understanding of Jesus that bumper sticker, “Don’t believe everything you think” ...about him. Pope Francis helps. He comes along and says Jesus is above all joyful and is completely about mercy. “Joyful” and “Mercy”? That’s not really what I was raised to think about Jesus. How about “serious”, “solemn”, and “scrutinizing”?

We all must take our minds for a walk. Let in some fresh air, open the doors and confines of our narrow ways of thinking of Jesus and believing in him, which we have picked up from our own religious culture just as the people of Jesus had picked up what they thought and believed from their Jewish culture. Culture corrodes, culture encrusts, culture obscures, culture co-opts our own thinking. “You have heard it said... but I say to you.” From Jesus comes the fullness, the light, the truth.

If you apply just three lenses to looking at Jesus, you allow the truer Jesus to come to you for you to believe in.

First Lens: True God and true man. Jesus so left behind the privileges of God that he had to learn who he was and what he was about in a fully human and progressive way, had to grow in his consciousness of being the Messiah, the Son of God. He asked genuine questions of the scholars in the temple at twelve. He needed the revelation at the Jordan “You are my beloved son in whom I take delight.” His question to disciples, “Who do people say I am?” was not a fully rhetorical question; there was a reason and a need for the long nights in prayer before his God. There was a reason for the Messianic Secret beyond being misunderstood by others as he was gradually leaving the mystery of himself. He was genuine in the garden asking friends to stay with him as he sincerely pleaded, “Take this cup from me, but let your will, not mine, be done”; and he fully felt on the cross “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”, even as he entrusted his soul in darkness into the hands of the father with his last breath. This is a real Jesus to think about, to learn about, to believe in, to love.

Second lens: Jesus was all about the kingdom rather than about heaven. We’ve got their importance backwards. Heaven—that is, what immediately happens to us at the moment of death—he hardly speaks about; heaven is a way station, some unrevealed reality of safely being with him, some temporary paradise, some in-between condition like a night’s sleep. He leaves it mostly in mystery and is not particularly interested in it. What he was all and passionately about, which is a far different reality than heaven, was the kingdom. His teachings, his parables, his actions, his very life, death, and resurrection were all about the breaking into our real world of God’s full reign, transforming the world, bringing us risen, transformed, bodily into this new world of union with God in Christ, in light, in love, in peace, in at last being fully alive, fully ourselves, fully what God has always meant us to be and which Jesus ushered in by being who he was, living as he did, and by being raised up bodily from death. Jesus totally committed to and consumed by the kingdom is really someone to think about, and to believe in, and to love.

Third lens: The only true God we know is the God made known in the life, death, resurrection, and ongoing presence in the spirit of Jesus. You’ve heard the sarcastic line, “In the beginning God made man in his own image... and man returned the favor!” Sarcastic but true. We continually make God in our own image, according to how we think and what we want. We almost can’t help but do so. Jesus reveals in himself the truth of God, our only way to the truth of God. What do we find: “Be perfect in mercy as your heavenly Father is perfect in mercy.” God, who gives the rain and the sun to come down and to shine not just on the good, but on all. God whose care for us is so much greater than his care for the swallow or the flower, or the blade of grass. God who calls us to love the stranger, the orphan, the widow, the homeless, the poor, the refugee and migrant, the child, the ill, the imprisoned as he compassionately cares for these

his special ones. God, who powerfully, resolutely, firmly, forcefully stands against injustice, inhumanity, cruelty, hardheartedness, and leading others astray in the name of religion. Jesus as the revelation of the true face of God is indeed a Jesus to think about, and to believe in, and to love.

Let us all take our believing minds for a walk; let's not believe everything we think; let's let the gospels in prayer—with the help of some good reading, some good preaching, some good discussion, and with God's grace—expose us to the real Jesus Christ and to what he makes known to us. Let's on this Sunday really hear him say to us, "You have heard it said... but I say to you". In the Eucharist the real Jesus Christ is with us in all his truth for us to find and to whom to be exposed in our own truth.