

The Prince and the Statue

Once upon a time there was a young prince. He was very handsome except for one thing, he had a crooked back. This birth defect caused him great sorrow. It also kept him from being the kind of prince that he really wanted to be for his people. One day the prince's father asked the best sculptor in his kingdom to make a statue of the prince. It should portray him, however, not with a crooked back, but with a straight back. The king wanted his son to see himself as he could be. When the sculptor finished the statue, it was truly magnificent. It was so lifelike that you could mistake it for the prince. The king placed the statue in the prince's private garden. Each day when the prince went to the garden to study, he looked longingly at the statue. Then one day he noticed that when he did this, his heart beat faster and his body tingled. Months passed. Soon the people began to say to one another, "The prince's back doesn't seem as crooked as it once did." When the prince heard this, his heart beat even faster and his body tingled even more. Now the prince began to go to the garden more often. He spent hours standing before the statue, studying it closely, and meditating on it. Then one day a remarkable thing happened. The prince found himself standing as straight as the statue.

That story is a kind of parable of you and me. We too were born to be a prince or a princess. But we too had a defect that kept us from being the kind of person we were meant to be. Then one day our Father in heaven sent his only Son, Jesus, into the world. Jesus is the perfect image of what you and I were born to be. He stands spiritually straight and beautiful. When we look at Jesus, our heart beats faster, our body tingles, and we begin to dream. But that's as far as our story goes. It's still unfinished; it's still incomplete. Whether we become like Jesus or not is something still to be decided. Whether our story will have a happy ending, like the story of the prince, is something still to be determined.

This raises an immensely important question. What can we do to guarantee that our story will have a happy ending, like the story of the prince?

The answer to that question is simple. We must do what the prince did. As the prince studied and pondered the statue, so we must study and ponder Jesus. "Learn from me," says Jesus in today's gospel, "for I am meek and humble of heart." Concretely, how do we go about standing before Jesus and studying him, as the prince stood before the statue and studied it?

There are two answers to that question. First, we can begin doing what a lot of serious Christians are doing today. We can begin making Bible reading and prayer a greater part of our daily lives. Ralph Martin, a Catholic layman, writes: "A real estate man I know gets up early in the morning to pray; an aerospace engineer prays and reads Scripture on his lunch hour; a production manager of a computing firm prays after the children are in bed at night." And so the first thing we can do is to do what many serious people are doing. We can begin making Bible reading and prayer a greater part of our lives.

This brings us to the second thing we can do. We can begin listening to the gospel reading at Mass in a more profound way. We can begin listening to it not just with the ears of the body, but also with the ears of the mind, the ears of the heart, and the ears of the soul. What do we mean by this?

First, consider the mind. Listening with the ears of the mind doesn't mean just listening to Jesus saying, "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart." It means visualizing Jesus saying this. It means seeing the look in his eyes and the expression on his face as he says it. It means imagining the gospel event in our mind's eye. It means making it come alive again. And this brings us to the second point: listening with the ears of the soul. Listening with the ears of the soul doesn't mean just listening to Jesus saying, "**Learn from me**".

It doesn't mean just hearing Jesus speak these words to some nameless audience in far-off gospel times. It means hearing Jesus say these words to each one of us in modern times. It means realizing that when we hear Jesus speak in the Gospel, he is speaking directly to us. It means we hear him say, Mary or Tim, learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart."

This brings us to the final point: listening with the ears of the heart. Listening with the ears of the heart, again, doesn't mean just hearing Jesus say, "**Learn from me**". It means taking these words to heart. It means applying them to our own lives.

Years ago a motorist stopped at a farmhouse. On the porch was an elderly woman. Working around the house was an elderly man. He was whistling nonstop in a tuneless way. The motorist asked about the whistling. "It's for my wife," said the elderly man. "She went blind a few years ago, and it left her terribly frightened and lonely. Hearing me whistle lets her know that I am nearby and watching over her." That's an example of listening with the heart. It's taking to heart the gospel message. It's doing something about it.

And so we come back to our starting point. If our life is to have a happy ending, if we are to grow into the image of Christ, as the prince grew into the statue's image, we must do what the prince did. We must begin to study and to ponder Jesus, as the prince studied and pondered the statue, not just with the eyes and ears of the body, but also with the eyes and ears of the mind, the soul, and the heart. And if we do this, someday we too will become like Jesus, who was meek and humble of heart; and our story, like the story of the prince, will have a happy ending. And when you are meek and humble of heart, you will know that...

YOU ARE LOVED, DEACON

DAN

+ A Homily from Mark Link