

29th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle A

Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

Psalms 96:1, 3, 4-5, 7-8, 9-10

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5B

Matthew 22:15-21

Rev. Charles B. Gordon, C.S.C.

The Garaventa Center

The University of Portland

In Jesus Christ, God breaks in to our everyday human world. He is no sooner noticed, however, than people try to snuff him out. In our Gospel today, Jesus' enemies have come up with a clever plan. In front of carefully chosen witnesses, they try to flatter and coax Jesus into making remarks that the authorities, secular or religious, would regard as treasonous. Jesus sees through them, and by a very subtle response to their question, outwits them.

Jesus' opponents, on this occasion, use human reason, one of God's noblest gifts, to try to choke off God's presence in the world. It's hard to imagine a more perverse use of the human intellect. I think, though, that our modern culture tries to trick us into doing something quite similar. It tries to make us ignore or deny or explain away, the occasions when the Divine breaks in to our everyday lives.

Many people will tell you that miracles, if they ever happened, don't happen any more. I disagree. I think the problem is that when they do happen, we manage to blind ourselves to them. Let me give you a few examples from my own experience.

I know a woman who makes a regular habit of Scripture reading. Several years ago, when she was engaged to be married, her father, whom she loved dearly, suddenly died. She was heartbroken. It seemed especially tragic that her father wouldn't be present at her wedding. She

went to the Scriptures for solace. She opened her Bible at random, and read, "Sons I will give you in place of your fathers." This gave her comfort. Today she has three children -- all boys. This is her miracle. It has helped her to become a strong, committed Christian. But our modern world would dismiss it all, as coincidence.

I know another woman who, in her forty's, became very ill. The doctors told her husband that her condition was terminal. She was about to die. He broke the news to their teenage sons, and bought them new suits to wear at their mother's funeral... but they didn't stop praying. She recovered, and very shortly thereafter became pregnant. Several years later the mother is fine, and the new child is a delight. This is her miracle. And our modern way of thinking blandly assures us that it can all be explained away... somehow.

I know a man with a life-long devotion to the Blessed Virgin, who was hospitalized with a serious illness. One evening, he was lying in his hospital bed, having just finished praying his rosary, when Our Lady appeared to him, and comforted him... Or was it just a reaction to the medication he was taking?

I could go on giving example after example, and I'm sure many of you could do the same. God *does* break into our lives, in amazing ways. But, if we are so inclined, we can always ignore it, deny it, or explain it away. In our Old Testament reading the people of Israel are able to see God's love for them, even in the depredations of a heartless conqueror. I don't know if we can equal their profound faith. But at least we ought to be able to see God's hand in the good things -- the remarkable things -- that happen to us.

There will never be a miracle that we can't explain away if we set

our mind to it. That's because God wants us to have *faith*. We can't have faith if we've been beaten over the head with certified miracles until we are compelled to believe. That would be certainty, not faith. There will always be space left for us to choose to affirm or deny God's actions in the world. And there is something in our modern way of thinking that will tempt us to deny them. We can't predict miracles. We can't compel God to perform them on demand. But we can be open to wonderful things that our loving God does for us... and we can allow them to transform our lives.