Ordinary 25B – 2021

It boggles my mind to think that there was a time, not too long ago, when the gospel passage that we just heard was preached shamelessly in churches where wealthy parishioners had private padded pews, sheltered from drafts, while the poor were banished to bare back benches and others were excluded entirely.

It's a sad reminder that there's a persistent, primitive urge in most social animals to establish a fixed order of dominance and submission. First studied in chickens, the phenomenon was labeled "the pecking order". Further study revealed that what was true for chickens also applied to chimps, wolves, hyenas, horses, lions and on and on in the animal kingdom. (From the Episcopal Café by David Sellery.)

Fr. Dennis Hamm tells the story of his experience of feeding twin nephews.
One small jar of Gerber's baby food, one spoon, and a pair of four-month-old twin boys harnessed in their dual highchair—these were the ingredients that set the stage for a little epiphany regarding human nature. I was visiting old friends, a couple who were enjoying their fourth month of parenting twin boys, David and Paul. Thinking their celibate visitor might enjoy feeding the youngsters, they supplied me with spoon and pablum and challenged me to the task.

The process began smoothly enough. Toggling between mouth and mouth, my feeding operation fell into a steady rhythm, David and Paul apparently content to take their food from this stranger (Mommy and Daddy comfortingly visible in the background).

And then—in a fit of perverse playfulness, or a spurt of experimental inquiry? — I suddenly broke the rhythm and delivered two spoonfuls in a row to David, whereupon Paul instantly flew into rage. Immediately I knew he was right and I was wrong. I had violated some primal sense of fairness and had begun to distribute nutrition unevenly.

That little event set me thinking. Paul's was a righteous passion. A psychobiologist could probably tell me how infants are genetically hard-wired to fight for survival by loudly claiming their share of nutrition. It was professor Rene Girard who was the first to propose what he called a "mimetic desire". (He used the word "mimetic" because it is derived from the Greek root which means "to imitate, or mimic, another's behavior".) He hypothesized that "we borrow our desires from others. Far from being autonomous, our desire for a certain object is always provoked by the desire of another person — the model — for this same object".

The experience gave rise to a question: was there any connection between our primal need to fight for survival and the general human propensity to grab even more than is needed—for any number of motives (insurance against an uncertain future, the assertion of one's relative worth and status, reprisal against enemies)? History seems to say, yes; a good instinct can develop into an evil and dangerous desire and way of life. (From *Of Pablum and Passion* by Dennis Hamm, SJ)

Big Men in Little Planes

There is an interesting story that comes out of the Second World War. England and Germany both had state-of-the-art fighter planes. Germany had the Messerschmitt, which was considered to be the world's fastest fighter plane. The British had the Supermarine Spitfire. The Spitfire was slower than the Messerschmitt. Nevertheless, German pilots were envious of their British counterparts. You see, the Messerschmitt had been designed to hold the perfect German. Who was the perfect German? Who else but DerFuhrer, Adolf Hitler. Hitler was little more than five feet tall. However, the German pilots who guided the Messerschmitt were considerably taller than 5 feet. So the Germans had to fly in very cramped quarters. But who was going to tell Adolf Hitler that he was not the perfect German?

The Messerschmitts were faster, but their pilots were not happy men.

It is an amazing fact, but many leaders fail because of big egos. Big men in little planes, Big egos in little men. "Pride goeth before a fall," says the ancient adage. And it's true. (by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com)

"Baby, tell me what God feels like."

Soon after the birth of her brother, four-year-old Sachi began to ask her parents to leave her alone with the new baby. Worried that she might feel jealous and want to hit and shake the newborn, her parents said no. But the little girl's pleas to be left alone with her brother became more urgent, and since she treated the baby lovingly and gently, her parents decided to allow it. Delighted, Sachi went into the baby's room and closed the door, but it opened slightly, allowing her curious parents to peek in and listen.

They watched as their daughter put her face close to her baby brother's and whisper, "Baby, tell me what God feels like. I'm starting to forget." (Dan Millman, *Chicken Soup For the Soul*, Health Communications, Inc., Deerfield Beach, FL: 1993). The innocence of this little four-year-old-girl is disarming, particularly to adults grown crusty and cynical with age.

When Jesus recommended that the apostles emulate the little child set in their midst, Jesus reminded them of the innocence that they had long since outgrown. Indeed, their innocence had been replaced by ambition as to who was most important among them. By offering the example of the child and by calling them to be the servants of all, Jesus challenged them to rethink their attitude toward Him, toward God and toward one another. Those who would rank first among them as leader must become the least among them.
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