

Beyond Being Liked

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

February 17, 2019

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We are so used to things like approval ratings and voting in our country. The benefit is that we know how the general public really feels and everyone gets a voice. The problem, though, is that some people who would be great role models, politicians, or public figures never seem to make it. They aren't popular enough...true prophets hardly ever are. It is the ones who are self-promoting who make it to the top. These are the ones who have mastered the art of being liked.

In the beatitudes, which Jesus calls us to, there is no mention about being liked. Now I'm sure Jesus wants us to get along with everybody and be friendly, but that isn't the point. In the beatitudes, Jesus sees the blest ones as the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the hated, the excluded, and the insulted. These are the ones who, honestly, most of us do not like, the ones we do not approve of or vote for. Actually, there is one mention of being liked in the beatitudes. It is when Jesus says, "woe to you when all speak well of you." It is not a positive thing at all. Those who constantly need to be flattered with approval and praise are false prophets. They actually don't stand for much other than themselves.

The point of our Christian lives is not to be liked, but to stand up for the Kingdom of God: a kingdom of truth and love, of peace and justice, and of openness and mystery.

The spiritual author Fr. Henri Nouwen had a real gift of speaking to people's hearts. After centuries of institutional religion, he was one of the first priests to develop a new approach to ministry, one that involved tenderness and vulnerability. He was quite successful at what he did. As a teacher, his classes were a favorite among university students and as a writer, his books really took off. But even he struggled for most of his life with his personal need for approval. If he wasn't liked, he felt horrible. The smallest criticism would eat away at him. Finally, one day his close friend, Sue Mosteller, confronted him and out of love told him, "you have been looking for friends all your life; you have been craving for affection as long as I've known you; you have been interested in thousands of things; you have been begging for attention,

appreciation, and affirmation left and right. The time has come to claim your true vocation- to be a father..." (*Return of the Prodigal Son*, 22) In other words, it is time for you to grow up. Live for something other than being liked.

The beatitudes call us beyond our personal needs for approval and popularity.

Question: Do I let my need for approval get in the way of the kingdom of God?

Life has to be more than being liked. That game, which we can play when we are young, gets old. Each of us is constantly being challenged by Jesus to grow up. The prophet Jeremiah said, "cursed is the one who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh." Let us not put our energy and efforts into being liked, but into being like Jesus.