

Seton Hall University

From the Selected Works of Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, S.T.L., S.S.L., D.Phil.

September 13, 2009

The Challenging Vocation of Teacher

Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil., *Seton Hall University*

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND International License.



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/fatherlawrence_frizzellphil/274/

The Challenging Vocation of Teacher

**Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell
Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies
Seton Hall University
South Orange, NJ**

This article was previously published in *The Catholic Advocate*.

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday Readings for September 13, 2009 for Cycle B:

Isa 50:4-9; Ps 116; Jas 2:14-18; Mk 8:27-35

THE CHALLENGING VOCATION OF TEACHER

Lawrence E. Frizzell

In a century and culture that prides itself in the development of communication technology, we still find ourselves complaining that others do not listen. "I might as well talk to the wall," shouts an exasperated mother. "Rover (the deaf old dog) listens better than you do!" How many teenagers or spouses block their ears so that they ignore those closest to them? How many of us run from silence so that we won't risk hearing the voice of God or conscience?

The attitude of consciously listening to God's word is a prerequisite for true prayer and for growth into deeper union with God. For this reason the basic concession of faith and obedient love in the Jewish tradition begins with a call to attention. "Listen, O Israel, the Lord our God is Lord alone" (Dt 6:4). The people's ears must be dug out by God (Ps 40:6) and their heart circumcised (Dt 30:6) so that they will be capable of loving him with all their heart and souls. From early times the liturgy called for a daily effort to respond to God's gifts; the text of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 became the nucleus of a prayer "when you lie down and when you rise" (6:7).

During the Babylonian Exile the people had ample opportunity to reflect on the loss of God's gifts of Land and Temple. Prophets in the tradition of Isaiah depicted the role of Israel's teachers as the servants of God. They needed to continue learning on a daily basis if their own instruction was to be suited to the people's true needs. "Morning by morning God wakens my ear to give heed as disciples should. The Lord God has opened my ears and I did not disobey or run away" (Is 50:4-5).

One of the reasons for the teacher to be "tuned in" to God's word constantly is the recalcitrance of those in his or her care. Children may not listen, adolescents may rebel and adults may persecute those guiding them. "I gave my back to the floggers, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard. I did not hide my face from insult and spittle" (Is 50:6). Why should one put up with such insubordination? Any parent, teacher or other leader who expects popularity and appreciation has not reflected on the pattern of the vocation that they accepted. The prophet offers a consoling assurance that God will never desert those dedicated to him. "The Lord God will help me!" (50:7 and 9).

The civilized way for adults to deal with "irreconcilable differences" is to bring the case to court. The prophet calls for such action. "Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together (before the judge)...Indeed, the Lord God will help me! Who can get a verdict against me?" (50:8-9). An indomitable faith is essential for perseverance through the vicissitudes of one's vocation.

At an early stage of his public ministry Jesus gained a certain support from the populace, partly because of his impressive way of teaching and partly because of his deeds of healing. This Sunday's passage from the Gospel according to Mark shows how Jesus wanted to challenge his disciples as

they matured in their cooperation with his Father's plan. They may have luxuriated in their intimacy with Jesus who was winning popular acclaim, but how would they react when he seemed to be a loser?

Simon Peter, already the acknowledged spokesman for the apostles, declared that Jesus is the Anointed (Christos in Greek) of God, the instrument through whom the Kingdom of God would be established. The common perception was that, as Son of David, the Messiah (Hebrew for "anointed") would be a victorious warrior-king. To offset such a military image Jesus described the manner in which his resolute adherence to the Father's will would bring persecution and death. The reference to Jesus' resurrection was ignored by Peter, who was certain that there should be an easier way. How could Peter be an effective servant of the Gospel if he failed to realize a fundamental truth? "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, says the Lord" (Isa 55:8-9). The sharp rebuke of Jesus, calling Peter "satan" (adversary), is followed by an instruction indicating that all forms of discipleship must incorporate the mystery of the cross into the Christian life. As we face disruptive responses to our efforts of proclaiming the Gospel we rest assured that the Lord God will help and sustain us. We pray also for those whose burdens are especially difficult to bear, including parents and teachers.

Thus John introduces those who hear or read the Gospel into an understanding of the Master, "that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that through this belief you may have life in his name" (20:31). However, the full implications of the signs and instructions of his public ministry can be appreciated only in faith that is focused on the resurrection. "When he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said these things, and they came to believe the Scripture and the word Jesus had spoken" (2:22, see 12:16). We may think that the disciples and the crowds who encountered Jesus were especially privileged. If asked which century would be the most exciting to live in, many of us would choose the time of Jesus. However, we are the privileged ones, because our faith has the benefit of the insights that matured through the guidance offered to the Church by the Holy Spirit. "The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you" (14:26).