

Homily for the Twentieth Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)
St. Joseph's Neier/SFBRHS Luke 18 Class of 2018 August 16-17, 2014
Rev. Kevin Schmittgens

Central Idea: God calls us out of our "default" settings to look at something new and more truthfully.

*The woman came and did Jesus homage, saying, "Lord, help me."
He said in reply,
"It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." She said,
"Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters."
Then Jesus said to her in reply, "O woman, great is your faith!"*

Beware your default settings!

Whenever you open up a new computer or gadget, or even when you download a new version of an operating system (if you have no idea what I am talking about, hang in there), there are what are called presets or default settings. For instance, most computers are preset for the United States and for English. You can go in and change your defaults. For instance, you can change the look of your desktop or the page onto which your browser will open. These are your defaults. Ultimately, defaults make life easier. You don't have to think each time you open your iPad or computer, you don't have to start from scratch. Defaults are helpful and time saving.

Nevertheless, beware your default settings!

Whenever I download a new version of iOS, which seems like it is every week, your iPhone or your iPad reboots. (If you have no idea what I am talking about, continue to hang in there.) When it reboots, it tends to default some stuff that I don't want. For instance, whenever it reboots, my Bluetooth system will automatically be activated. I like me some Bluetooth, every now and then, but I don't need it a lot of the time. Having it on drains my battery rather quickly, so I have to make a conscious effort to go into the system every time there is a new update, and change the default so that everything works better. (If you have been following me, congratulations, you are computer and gadget literate. If not, now comes the explanation.)

I think we as human beings have default settings in our souls. We have preset ways of approaching the world, approaching the truth, approaching life. An atheist, a non-believer has a close call with death and, because their default setting is set for "God does not exist," they just figure they were lucky. A believer has the exact same experience and because their default setting is "I am loved by God," they understand that they are blessed.

I have seen this big time in people's reactions to the mess in Ferguson (one of my old stomping grounds.) Think about how you personally responded when you first heard the story. Some of you may have thought, your preset, your default was, "the officer must have been justified. There has to be a reason." Some of you may have thought, your preset, your default was "Here we go, again, another example of police overreaction and possibly even racism." And even when new facts come out, we often stick to our defaults, as we have seen when they released the video tape from the convenience store. That didn't change anyone's mind, it just reinforced their previous positions. It actually made things worse. The sad part is not only could I tell you who would have been on what side nationally, I could even tell you, from among my friends and family, who would line up on what side. Not only are our defaults prevalent, they are also maddeningly predictable. Maybe that is why it seems we haven't made much progress in the matter of race relations. (The truth is we have, but not nearly enough.)

Here is the remarkable thing that we learn from our gospel today. Even Jesus, in his human nature, had his defaults, had his presets. When the Canaanite woman, a foreigner and a Gentile, approaches Jesus seeking help for her daughter, Jesus' default mode seems almost crass. (Emphasis on the word, seems.) Initially, he tells her that he is only there for the children of Israel. When she pleads her cause, concisely and succinctly, Jesus discards his default settings and opens his heart to her.

We learn from this amazing story two things. One our default settings are common and understandable. They are how we operate in the world. They should come as no surprise. But conversely, they can get in the way, they often do not serve us and the cause of truth and justice very well. We would be smart to beware our default settings. They keep us from the truth, they keep us from compassion, they keep us from advancing, they keep us from the way of God, mainly because they makes us both lazy and simplistic.

{Class of 2018, I want you to seriously think about your default settings you have adopted entering high school. Some of them may be self-defeating. Part of what we are called to do here at Borgia, is to challenge you, to call you beyond your limitations. That's why your parents want you to be here. Let me speak briefly about three of your challenges, one academic, one personal and one spiritual. First the academic. How do you respond to the word MATH? What is your mathematical default? If you like it, congratulations, you will have success in your life! If you don't, learn to like it, because how you do in math will make a difference as to what you will accomplish in life. I will be upfront with all of you: I never want to hear any of you say that you are no good at it. I will give you a detention for that, so that you can sit for an hour with my good friend Mr. Noelker and he can tutor you in it! Don't give up on it before you even begin, the second is personal. Second, how do you respond to demanding things? What is your difficulty default? The people who give up rather quickly, will never accomplish much in their lives. The people whose eyes widen and they smile and say "bring it on" will do

great things. Don't be afraid of the difficult things. If your default setting tells you to give up, go in to the control panel of your soul and change the dang settings! Finally, what is your compassion default? Do you dare to have the heart of Jesus? When a classmate is picked on unfairly, will you have the courage to change the preset from apathy to action?}

The present situation in our area is a difficult thing, but ignoring it won't help the situation any. What is the truth of the situation in Ferguson? Who can say? I know I don't have all the answers. But I will give it a shot. Was Michael Brown, the victim, simply a gentle giant as his parents claim? *If* it was him in the released videotape? Uh, no. On the other hand, what parent knows everything their child does? I can only imagine the grief of his family. Did he deserve to be killed? Uh, no. Did the officer overreact? Apparently, he did. But if you were in that situation what would you have done, how would you have responded? That question chills me, and if it doesn't chill you, you need to go back and think about that. And not just "kinda" think about it, I mean, REALLY think about it. People who criticize authority usually have not been in that position. Does what happened justify burning and looting? No way! Is that indicative of a deeper social problem, injustice and wound? You bet.

How do we solve this? It won't be easy, but I am certain I know step one:

Change the presets of our hearts.

Beware your default settings!