

How all of us have prayed as St. Paul did in today's reading and God answered the prayer of Paul as he does so many others: God does not take the thing away, but gave Paul the strength to bear it. God does not spare us of trials, but can enable us to overcome them. He can do so when we are willing to humble ourselves – to admit our needs and the burdens of our weaknesses. And it is then that we will see God.

I know that when I go down on my knees in prayer I do see God and when I stand – the issues/burdens are still there but they look a whole lot different and not near as overwhelming.

That is precisely why the hometown crowd of Jesus could not – would not – see it was God before them. They could not look within themselves to see the many burdens of weakness in their lives that needed to be moved by the grace of Christ who stood before them.

We are told that Jesus *could not work any mighty deed in his hometown.* We are not told that he *would not* work any deed, but that he *could not*. For Jesus to work in our lives he needs our faith to release his power – he needs us to realize we need him before he can work his mighty deeds in our lives. Okay, imagine this illustration:

+A father asked his son to pick up rocks in a certain area of the yard. The father watches him and sees him struggling to pull up a huge rock buried in the dirt. Finally, the boy gave up and went to his dad, “*I can't do it.*” Dad: “*Did you use all of your strength?*” The boy was hurt, “*Yes, sir, I used every ounce of strength I have.*” The father smiled and said, “*No you didn't. You didn't ask me to help.*” Then the two of them go over and work on moving the rock out of the dirt. Notice I didn't say he removed the rock; but that they moved it working together. Nor did I say how long it took them to move that rock. What I mean by this is sometimes our trials can take a significant period of time and we wonder if God is there – If you asked, God is, but sometimes for His purpose it takes time to work through it all.

Jesus can help move our burdens and he can also fill the holes and gaps they leave behind. When Jesus comes to Nazareth, he puts himself to a very sever test. He was coming to his hometown and there are no harsher critics than those who we have known since childhood.

+Mass with my family can be somewhat difficult for me – esp. when it comes to the homily – because they know me through and through. How many “*sermons*” my mother or father preached to me as a teen that I ignored? I continue speaking and then glance at my younger brother – who may have memories of me cruelly teasing him or belittling him. (Oh how I wish more than anything I could take it all back and love him as I do today.)

Perhaps, just maybe, though, my family listens to me (for the most part) because they know that Christ has filled those gaps, the holes of my past, with the same grace that filled the gaps St. Paul's past. Instead of Patrick or Paul, they see and hear glimpses of Christ.

That is why St. Paul said “*I am content with my weakness*” – for when he steps back and allows God into his need, it is much easier for others to see God in him. Secondly, the issues he may be going through can often bring him closer to God.

Let's imagine St. Paul is speaking these words today: *"Lord, I lost my job and I know you were not the cause of this. However in this trial, it has shown me how much I truly need you in my life. I am not sure how long it may be to move this great stone, but nonetheless, I know I have you with me in my life and for this I am content with my weakness."*

+Monsignor Lane said that when he was in seminary they would sometimes see one of their fellow brothers suddenly begin to a great deal more of time before the Blessed Sacrament. He said it could be one of two things: He had a deeper conversion experience or that he may be having vocation issues! Even if the latter, it is bringing him closer to Christ in whatever he decides.

In my past and in my present, there was/is sin, but Jesus had no such sinful past growing up (as he was without sin). We can say with certainty, that he was never cruel or belittled another peer. As a matter of fact, he probably moved many stones and bridged gaps even as a young child. We can well imagine that he took up for the one being picked upon - he went to the one kid everyone else pushed away.

You see, my family and peers might have an excuse not to listen to me because they find it hard to reconcile with my somewhat sinful past. However, with Jesus this was not the case at all – they had no excuse to do so. And so they attack his humble origins, saying *"Is he not the carpenter?"* They refused to see this carpenter could fix their lives just as he did their gates that bridged gaps in their fields and repaired their carts that carried their burdens.

Yes, in their reactions we can that familiarity breed's contempt. They knew his family and his background and they could not believe that greatness could arise from this. They simply wrote him off. We see people doing this all the time throughout history, with people thinking they know someone well enough that they have him/her pegged as one who will never amount to anything. Here are just a few who were pegged in this light:

+Thomas Aquinas was labeled as a *"big dumb ox"*. Ernest Hemingway was told by a teacher that he didn't have the talent for writing. Bishop Fulton Sheen's debate coach said he was a lousy public speaker. (For you young folks, he went on to have his own television and radio programs.) Perhaps someone said something like that to you, as well? They put you in a hole and throw a rock on top of you, belittling you with their words. Well, as I have elucidated here, Jesus is pretty good at moving stones and filling holes.

His hometown refused to respect Jesus because they thought he was just too *ordinary*. And yet they missed the very fact that this was his glory, because it means that when God came to earth, he claimed no exemptions. He took upon himself common life with all its common tasks to show us that accidents of birth, or fortune or pedigree have nothing to do with worth.

This is why Jesus could say that we must become like children to enter his kingdom – because God stepped out of his power and glory for human weakness – became a child to enter our human kingdom and therefore we, too, must become a child to enter his divine Kingdom. Why a child? Because a child is always in *need*.