



Nativity of John the Baptist St John the Baptist June 24 2015

1 Samuel 17: 1, 32-49

Psalm 9

2 Corinthians 6: 1-13

Mark 4:35-41

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In the first reading we find the Philistine army and their champion are gathered; a threat to life and to the very existence of Israel. The outcome of this primordial David and Goliath encounter is well known; it strikes a chord with each and every one of us; for in each of us there is a 'David'.

There is within everyone a desire, and a capacity, to overcome the forces that are a threat to life; and also a desire and capacity to defeat the forces that stop us from realising ourselves as a people of God.

However, we can also acknowledge within a 'Saul'; and that too strikes a different chord. Within us, we know also that voice that denies our desires and that diminishes our capacity; "*You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy*".

We can each translate this voice of denial for ourselves, a negative life commandment that somehow, like a hidden force of gravity, keeps us from the very encounter that gives us strength beyond our imagination.

Behind both these voices, behind our own 'David' and 'Saul' stand the armies of Israel and the armies of the Philistines; and it is the inner dialogue between our David and Saul that will be determinant of the armies that we unleash in the world.

The voice we chose to feed will grow stronger, and the voice that we listen too will determine the outcome of the dialogue. The narrative of the first reading gives us a landscape, or dreamscape in which we can see ourselves with some objectivity.

We can picture our inner David standing in front of the army of Israel, for David is our every dream, wish, opportunity, creative insight, divine inspiration; David is every prayer we utter, every possibility we imagine; and David is the voice of our integrity with God and with each other.

So we place our David into the landscape, and take a moment or three to honour the reality of ourselves that he represents. Saul is a giant; he is bigger than David, and so already has a size advantage; but can we recognise the voice of Saul within, where is the voice of denial, where do we hear the voice that diminishes us. For many it will be a life commandment carelessly uttered in our childhood; and for many it will actually be the voice of our culture and the voice of our religious faith.

Saul is a giant because he is fed by the agendas of the world; and we swallow much of his food for him.

In the second reading we hear from one who has denied the giant food and who has given voice to the 'David' within; Paul's letter therefore holds some clues for us in finding our voice of David. Paul describes the experience of finding our "Davidian" integrity: "*We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 9 as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see--we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.*"

And in that description we can see why we are easily seduced into feeding the giant!

"*We are treated as impostors, and yet are true*"; but we have a need to be accepted, to be included; however the truest being, the 'David' is not so seduced, for that self knows a greater truth than that advertised by the common culture.

"*as unknown, and yet are well known*"; David was the least of his brothers, and yet once again, when we scratch the surface of our 'knowing' we also know that there is more to life than being "*well known*".

Paul's letter reads like a series of experiential 'beatitudes':

as dying, and see--we are alive

as punished, and yet not killed

as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing

And these culminate with the hall-mark of counter-cultural living: *as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.*

David stands out from the crowd and from his brothers; and his position puts him in the forefront of the armies of Israel, the very place of the church; well, the place where the church is called to be!

When we read today's gospel, we should not be surprised to find another 'David and Goliath' narrative; Jesus asleep on the boat, like David unseen and in the background, is called forth to still the storm, the Goliath of nature.

It would be helpful for us to now compare the attributes from the first reading with those of the gospel, to understand that Jesus is making real the Old Testament enlightenment; however it is perhaps more helpful to appreciate that this, and similar gospel narratives have been distorted to add fuel to the giant. The 'usual' interpretation of the gospel narrative underlines and so gives voice to the miraculous supernatural powers of Jesus; so powerful that the disciples were "*filled with great awe.*"

We are left thinking that this is because Jesus is special, he is not like us; and that interpretation is the voice of 'Saul' all over again: "*You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy*"

Jesus can still the storm, but, "*You are not able to*".

However if we read the gospel, in the light of the first reading, we might pay closer attention to the dialogue; and there we discover that Jesus has an expectation that his 'David-like' action will be seen and embodied by the disciples; "*Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?*"

The gospel narrative is cleverly crafted to give us the reader an insight into the movement Jesus is revealing for us, rather than to us.

"*Jesus said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."*"; this is a narrative about shifting positions, and it involves "*leaving the crowd behind*"; it invites us into that fearful place of being counter-cultural, we are invited into the very storm of life!

And as we confront the giant storm, so the voice of 'Saul' cuts in; we diminish the enlightenment offered and write the whole process off as a miracle of Jesus.

Perhaps we should ask; why anyone would write a story about only one person that God endows with power; for the obvious answer is, that wouldn't and they haven't; the story of David and the story of Christ, as realised by Paul; is our story.

A few years ago I encountered an old woman carrying rocks in quarry in Bali, she had a strength that surpassed mine and that left me "*filled with great awe.*"

In that encounter I was manifestly Goliath; and that was both humbling and sobering.

I gave her the equivalent of a month's wages, for I wanted to lighten her load, and we both found common ground as that brought a smile to both of us.

Only when we 'know' ourselves as Goliath, and 'know' the voice of 'Saul' that is also within can we begin to discern the truth of David.

And when we find the voice of David, then we can stop feeding the giant and perhaps discover that Christ reveals TO us who we really are.