

My Hometown  
Epiphany Church  
July 8, 2018

Good morning. The homily today will begin with a news break. Not breaking news, but a plea to the news to give us a break. In my long drive to and from Prince George's County, the radio is my news companion. Arriving home, after dinner, I turn on the television news. During the day emails and newsfeeds supply the rest.

What is much of the news coverage about, really? In the end, it is about the struggle for power. Political power – say, on appointing a Supreme Court justice or winning mid-term elections. Economic power – on trade wars with China. Military power – on ending a nuclear threat in North Korea. The power of terrorism – Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Closer to home, the power of weapons – a shooting at the Annapolis Capital Gazette. The source of this power can be traced back to Plato's *Republic*, that "justice is nothing else than the interest of the stronger." The interest of the stronger or, in other words, "might makes right."

Today's readings are also stories of power, but power of a different kind, from a different source. In the Gospel reading, from Mark, the setting is the hometown of Jesus -- a place where Jesus, it turns out, has little or no power. I'll come back to that. First, though, I love the setting of his story – Jesus "home town." All of us have a hometown, a place we were born or later came to call home. Bruce Springsteen, born in Asbury Park, NJ, penned his ballad called "My Hometown." "This is your hometown," he sings to his eight-year old son. "Your hometown."

I was born in Buffalo, N.Y. – it is still my hometown, no matter where I live. In my neighborhood, kids were fond of nicknames. When my brother Tom was around eight or so, there was a Disney movie called “The Love Bug” about a car with a mind of its own. The car was a Volkswagen, short and squat, and its name was Herbie. Tom was also short and squat. The neighborhood nicknamed him Herbie, after the Volkswagen. That is his name today: Herbie, or Herb. Around the same time there was a cartoon character on television called Secret Squirrel. When the squirrel was not playing detective, he had dark, thick glasses. My friend Bill Joyce, at the age of eight, had dark, thick glasses. Bill became Squirrel, and still is. My father’s name was “Al,” short for Aloysius, which I was forever spelling for my teachers. ALOYSIUS. One day the neighborhood nicknamed him “Ollie,” and the name stuck.

In your hometown, people know you from the outside: how and who you were when you grew up. No one really knows who you are on the inside, what you may believe, or who you are becoming or have become. When Jesus went back to his hometown, they did not know who he was. They saw him on the outside, not on the inside. Hearing him preach they asked, “Where did this man get all this? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” They took offense at him, and he could do no deed of power there, except for healing a few sick people. His power, his Kingdom, was not of this world, as he later said. It depended on the faith of people to receive him, and without this faith, Jesus had no power.

If all we see, if all we experience, is on the outside, we miss the faith that lives inside us. If all we see is Jesus the son of Mary, we miss Jesus the son of God. Paul knew this. Paul had a “thorn” that “was given him in the flesh.” We do not know what this was - some writers

suggest it was poor eyesight, or that it was because Paul was subject to repeated physical persecution. Paul, though, understood the “thorn” in terms of his relationship to God, as God saying to him: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” Not power on the outside, to cure what ailed him, but grace within, grace sufficient for Paul, grace sufficient for us. David, hundreds of years earlier, understood his own success as a king for 40 years not because of military or economic power, but because of his relationship with God. He became “greater and greater,” wrote Samuel, because the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.

Now let’s look again at the constant struggles for power we read about in newspapers and see and hear on radio and on television, the power of might making right. Is this really the world in which we live? There are two responses, one external, the other internal. The external response is to remember always that what we see and hear on the news is not all there is. Daily the work of lifting up the world is carried on by nurses, doctors, teachers, charities, non-profits; by parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts; by co-workers who care for and have become family for one another; by neighbors who look out for each other; by clergy and parishioners who know one another by name. If all we are seeing is what is on the news, the world is indeed a dark place of struggles for power. But that is not all there is; there is a goodness at work in the world if we raise our eyes to see it.

The other response, the internal response, is realizing that the world outside us is not the same as the world within us – the world in which we live and move and have our being. In this inner world, it is not the power of might that makes right. It is the power of faith. Faith is seeing all things in relationship to God. David sees this relationship as the key to his success as

king - for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him. Paul sees this relationship as God's power made perfect in Paul's own weakness. Jesus sees this relationship in his inability to use his own power because of the lack of faith of his hometown.

Seeing all things in relationship to God. In my hometown, my mother taught us to say a prayer when we heard the sound of an ambulance or fire engine. In my hometown, if the next day was special, such as a graduation, and would be helped by good weather (no guarantee in Buffalo), mom hung a rosary outside on the back fence. Did it work? On the weather, who knows? On seeing all things in relationship to God, yes. In my hometown, my brother Tom, months after losing his wife to cancer, visits his church at the end of the work day and sits in silence, sensing the presence of angels all around him, seeing his life anew in relationship to God.

What is our true hometown? It is to see all things in relationship to God. At the end of his life, Jesus told his disciples, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." We will come to them and make our home with them. Our hometown is not the place we were born or where we moved. It is the place in our hearts, in our souls, and in lives where God the Father and his Son Jesus have made their home with us. This is our hometown.

Amen.