

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Canadian theologian Bernard Lonergan had a major impact on philosophy and theology last century. Sometimes his language was so complex we had to buy a companion book to help us read the original work! Surprisingly, however, his most important insights were very simple and expressed in very simple language. One of them was that we regularly have “ah-ha” moments, where we get an insight into God, the world or ourselves. These moments make sense of things we have previously only seen as problems.

Matthew’s Gospel is filled with “ah-ha” moments. Written for a generally Jewish audience it reflects on Jesus in light of the history of Israel, the Hebrew Scriptures and the expectations of the Messiah. Jesus was for Matthew’s community, and is for us, the “ah-ha” in world history. By Matthew reflecting on his life, death, and resurrection, things he had previously only wondered about now made sense.

The phrase “the stone rejected by the builders” originally referred to Israel. In Psalm 118 and, more generally, in the Book of Psalms, the trials and defeats of Israel are seen to be tests of strength, love, and endurance. Despite everything Israel has gone through, the people continue to sing of God’s fidelity to them and what marvels God has done before their eyes, making them into a more faith-filled people.

Matthew, however, reflects on what happened to Jesus at the hands of the Chief Priests, Scribes and Romans. In a great “ah-ha” moment he sees that it is Jesus, not Israel, who is the stone rejected by the builders which has now become the key building block of a new edifice.

Doing exactly the same as Matthew does with this passage, we can apply it to our own lives as well. There are often facets of our personality or character of which we are ashamed or about which we despair. From gossip to greed, past hurts to anger, sexuality to broken relationships, we can often get discouraged at how un-together our Christian life is.

Even though we have worked hard to overcome our worst traits, we often think nothing good will ever come of them. In such a context we need to hear today’s Gospel, “The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the work of the Lord, a marvel in our eyes.”

The parts of our character we most despise could be the most marvelous moments of amazing grace. Nothing is irredeemable to God; nothing has gone too far or become too entrenched. In the Christian life there is no room for shame, only for repentance and starting over. Looking at things we have thought of as only being problems provides us with the greatest potential for “ah-ha” moments, where the healing and love of Christ enables us to turn our lives around, to demolish all the negative and defeatist self-talk in which we can indulge and rebuild ourselves with Christ, the master builder.

Once we get into the habit of doing this, it’s amazing how many “ah-ha” moments we have as our history ceases to be a problem to be overcome but turns into a challenge to be harnessed for the building up of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Fr. Eric T. Carpine, ofm