By Whom Is God's Work Done?

by WILLIAM W. BUECHEL

"Is not this the carpenter?", the people asked disparagingly of Jesus. How come this "jack of all trades" has so much wisdom? How come He is working miracles, when we know who He is? We know where He comes from, and who His people are. He isn't much, so why does He speak so mightily and do such wonders?

The best part of this account from the sixth chapter of St. Mark's Gospel is not the people's reaction to Jesus but the fact that He, the God-Man, chose such a lowly occupation from which to further God's kingdom on earth. So often we delude ourselves into thinking that to do God's work on earth we need to be in a grand position, with lots of influence and power, and lots of money. If we do not find ourselves in such a position, we take it as a foregone conclusion that God's work cannot be done by us. How wrong we are!

In the first place, we cannot do God's work at all unless He Himself helps us, no matter how important our station in life, no matter how large our bank account. All we need is a pure heart, and a desire to submit our will to His. He Himself makes possible the rest. God has shown this over and over again in Holy Scripture as well as in history apart from the Bible. See how He used Moses, a murderer with a speech impediment. Yet Moses was called "My friend" by the Almighty God Who used him to deliver an entire nation from the slavery of Egypt. Two women, Deborah and Jael, in the Book of Judges, brought to an end twenty years of oppression against the Israelites.

When Yahweh told Gideon to go and rescue Israel from the power of Midian, Gideon answered the Lord, "How can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manessah, and I am the least important in my family." Yahweh answered him, "I will be with you, and you shall crush Midian as though it were a single man." *(Judges 6:15-17).* Look what happened when the mighty Goliath was slain by the youngest and least likely to succeed of his family, yet he became not only the great king of Israel but a direct ancestor of Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament has many other examples of God's use of the lowly in His plan to extend His Kingdom among men. Judith and Esther are two prime examples of God's determination to use little ones to accomplish His overall plan. Look, too, to the opening words of the Prophet Jeremiah. The Lord Yahweh addressed Jeremiah with these beautiful words: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you came to birth I consecrated you. I have appointed you as prophet to the nations." Jeremiah, in utter humility, replied, "Ah, Lord Yahweh, look, I do not know how to speak: I am a child." But Yahweh reassured him that the Most High God would be with him, and not to be afraid of those to whom he would speak, for He Himself would protect him.

In the New Testament is John the Baptist, a lowly and humble man who protested that he was not worthy to so much as "kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals." He was referring, of course, to Jesus. Jesus Himself made every effort to show how He felt about the lowly and humble. First of all, though He Himself was the Promised One and the only Son of God, He did not consider it at all inappropriate to become a helpless little baby. Then, when He began His mission to save mankind from its sin, He picked as His closest followers not the great and influential priests and Pharisees, not the Scribes and the presidents of synagogues, but rather poor and unknown fishermen and other such characters. Had the Madison Avenue boys been around at that time they would have turned thumbs down on the chances for success of this venture of Jesus.

Position and prestige meant nothing to Jesus. If a person was in need, He helped, whether that man was a Roman centurian or a tax-collector or a prostitute. When His followers were arguing over who was the greatest among them, Jesus let them know in no uncertain terms that the greatest was really the least, that the greatest had to be the servant of them all. He pulled a child up on His knee and told His disciples that unless they become as little children, they would not enter the kingdom of heaven. He further practically illustrated this service that the greatest among them must give to the rest by washing their feet at the supper table on the first Holy Thursday night. He told the great men of His day, the Pharisees and the priests, that tax-collectors and prostitutes would enter the kingdom of heaven before they would, because they not only believed in Him but obeyed His teachings.

In the course of the two thousand year history of the Catholic Church founded by Jesus Christ, only the little ones became canonized saints. Oh, there were men and women of worldly prominence, yes. Kings and queens and emperors and prime ministers, yes. But every one of them without exception, no matter what their station in life or lack of it, were little ones in the spiritual life, following closely the example of their Savior and Guide, Jesus Christ.

Kings and queens of countries like France and Spain, Portugal and Italy, and also farm-hands and slaves and factory workers and housewives and even little children. They are all represented among the canonized saints of the Catholic Church because their hearts were pure and their sole desire was to do the will of God in extending His kingdom on earth. That's what makes saints. That's what one needs to enter the kingdom of heaven. Those are the people used by God to extend His kingdom on earth.

And for the one canonized saint, there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of little people who have also entered into the glorious presence of Almighty God, simply because their hearts were pure. All kinds of people, all shapes and sizes and colors, educated and uneducated, prestigious and worldly nothings, but all with one thing in common: a pure heart attuned to the will of Almighty God. □

William W. Buechel is a retired postal clerk, married, with 4 children, 16 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren. He has been a free-lance writer for 52 years, mostly for the Catholic press, and has had more than 640 pieces published in that time.