

Pentecost 18: A stumbling block or a stepping stone

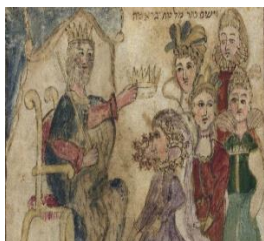
**Esther 7 1-6, 9-10, 9:20-22
38-50**

Ps 124

James 5 12-20

Mark 9:

At the start of preparation for this sermon I was thrilled to think I could talk about the OT lesson taken from one of only two books of the Protestant Bible named after women: Ruth is the other. For Catholic and Orthodox believers there are three as they also have the book of Judith, which is in our Apocrypha. Queen Esther's story is also the root of the Jewish festival of Purim, which remembers and celebrates her deliverance of her people, the Jews from Haman's evil plot to have them all killed. Jewish children celebrate the festival of Purim every year, including some fairly graphic imagery:



However, when I was researching the Gospel, I came upon a very striking piece in a Catholic liturgy resource that seemed to be what I needed to share with you instead. So, this edited reflection is largely by the late Fr Flor McCarthy is called *A stumbling block or a stepping stone*.

“Anyone who is not against us is with us. But woe to those who would put a stumbling block in front of the little ones.”

The way we live affects the lives of those around us for better or for worse. Whether we like or not, or are conscious of it or not, we can be a stumbling block on others' path or a stepping stone on the road to deeper relationship with the Divine one.

God wants us to be not stumbling blocks, but stepping stones, for one another. What does that look like, being stepping stones or stumbling blocks, causing scandal to others, is another way of putting it?



Here are some examples.

You are a scandal to me when you are unkind or unjust in the way you treat me. You make me feel small. You damage my self-confidence.

You are a scandal to me when you fail to understand my weakness, faults, mistakes and sins, and write me off as a result of them. When you condemn me you make me feel that I am evil.

You are a scandal to me when you humiliate me because I do not live up to your expectations. You hurt my pride and damage my self-image.

You are a scandal to me when you discourage me, keep me down, or hold me back. When you grab the limelight I am forced to retreat to the shadows and made to feel inferior.

You are a scandal to me when you refuse to accept me, when you exclude me, or ignore me. You make me feel a stranger and an outsider.

You are a scandal to me when you load me with unjust criticism and sour me with your own cynicism. You tear down my ideals, destroy my dreams, and act as a blight on my hopes.

You are a scandal to me when, God forbid, you exploit me by paying me poor wages (cf Second Reading). You make me into a slave so that you can live like a Lord. You impoverish me so as to enrich yourself.

If you do any of these things to me you are a darkness to me. You are an obstacle in my path. In a word that sums it all up you are a scandal to me on the road to becoming my God-given self, and

you make it difficult for me to dwell in the Kingdom of God. That is a very serious matter.

But you can also be a stepping stone, for me, an example, a help on the road to salvation. I will give you some examples of how this can be.

You are a stepping stone to me when you support me in moments of weakness and doubt.

You are a stepping stone to me when you give me a belief in myself, when you boost my self-confidence. You see something in me that I'm not able to see in myself.

You are a stepping stone to me when I am feeling inadequate and you help me to discover the special talents God has given me.

You are a stepping stone to me when you challenge me, make demands on me, are hard on me, not to hurt me, but to help me to grow and develop my potential.

You are a stepping stone to me when you accept me, though others reject me.

You are a stepping stone to me when you refuse to join the mob and throw the stone of accusation and judgement at me when I sin.

You are a stepping stone to me when you forgive me. You liberate me from my past, and I'm free to move forward again.

You are a stepping stone to me when you understand me and listen to me. One who understands me is nearer to me than my own brother or sister.

You are a stepping stone to me when you refuse to exploit my weakness or to take advantage of my mistakes.

If you have done any one of these things for me, how can I tell you what you mean to me?

You are a light to me in my darkness.

You are a signpost to me in my moments of doubt. You are a bridge over troubled waters. You are all this and much more. You are an example to me.

You are a friend.

Jesus said if you gave me as much as a cup of cold water you would be rewarded for it. But you have done much more than that. You have led me to your own well and shared it with me.

Let us pray to the Lord that God will help us at all times to be a stepping stone and not a stumbling block to others.

Amen

- Flor McCarthy SDB, 1984, pg 196 ff (edited)



References

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