

Thursday 5th Week Ordinary Time February 8, 2018 St. Agnes Church

Female chickens, hens, cooped up together in a barnyard, gradually establish a pecking order.

I mean this literally.

If you were to take the time and observe a flock of hens in a chicken coop, you will discover a “top bird”, a bird that has the right to peck all the others without being pecked in return, without the fear of retaliation by the other birds.

All the other hens will be subordinate to this top bird. This hierarchy extends through the entire flock.

A linear series of highest bird to lowest bird will show itself.

The #2 bird can peck all the other birds except the top bird.

The #3 bird can peck all the birds below it but cannot peck the top bird or the 2nd bird.

The lowest bird gets pecked by all the other birds,

but because of the established order it cannot peck at any other bird in the coop in return.

This social arrangement of the dominant over the subordinate

also manifests itself in human society: the rich over the poor, men over women,

the educated over the ignorant, those chosen by God over those not chosen by God.

Sometimes people use their belief in a “pecking order” in human relationships to justify behavior such as terrorism, abuse, genocide, infanticide.

In today’s gospel Jesus reminds the woman who comes to him

that there is a presumed pecking order with regards to His mission.

He has come to save the lost children of Israel.

She is a Gentile which puts her low in the pecking order.

She is a woman which puts her near the bottom of the pecking order.

She has no right to expect anything from Jesus other than the scraps that fall from the table.

She has no ground to stand on.

Jesus was free to turn her away according to social standards without fear of harming his reputation.

If he turned her away, no one was going to say to him “Jesus, you are hard hearted.

Jesus, you lack compassion. Jesus, you did the wrong thing.”

There would be no retaliation from any quarter.

Even though he doesn’t have to, Jesus chooses to help the woman in need.

She is spunk. She has a backbone. She stands up against the “pecking order”, challenges Jesus to re-think the established order of things.

In a way, she has no alternative, no other option.

She knows Jesus has the power to cast out demons, to free people from evil spirits.

That’s why she seeks him out.

If Jesus doesn’t act on her behalf, her daughter will remain imprisoned in evil.

The fact that Jesus does indeed act and frees the woman’s daughter shows the extent of God’s mercy and compassion.

God will not be limited by boundaries of human making.

His power will be used for the good of all and not just the dominant,

not just those with places high in the pecking order. Jesus has come to re-order human relationships.

In Christianity, human relationships are ordered according to love,

not according to dominance and subordination;

The thinking of a Christian, as exemplified by Jesus, is to be based in love

and not on the hierarchical model where people say

“I’m higher than you so you have to do what I tell you to do.”

Today’s gospel challenges us to change our perspective, to embrace a new birth.

There is a better way of ordering our world and Jesus offers that way.

Our prayer today: “ O Lord, help Your people to be as one. Like Jesus Your Son help us to use our resources to bring healing and life to others regardless of where they fall in the pecking order. Change the way we think about establishing order in this world. Amen!”