

Fr. Keith Boisvert
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33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

Recently I was working on something at home while listening to the classical radio station in Washington, and Mahler's First Symphony started playing. Not having heard it for a while, I stopped what I was doing and just closed my eyes and listened. This is the piece of music that got me through college, especially through some difficult times. There were 1½ years in the middle of college that were really rough for me, with lots of personal growth, falling in and out of love, relationships becoming more important than schoolwork, and grades suffering as a result. I suppose you could say this was my time for "finding myself" and discovering my path in life. I went through self-doubt and self-questioning: Am I loveable? Is life worth living? This was the only time in my life I ever looked off the roof of a building and considered the possibility of suicide (never really seriously, but I realized it was an option!).

I obviously made it through this crisis time in my life with the supportive environment of family and friends and God's love. And I can remember many, many times returning to my dorm room and putting on the stereo to listen to Mahler's First Symphony. It spoke to my condition, and I identified with it. I became absorbed in its music and it lifted me out of myself. With its sudden mood swings from sorrow to joy, from agony to ecstasy, it gave me a sense of hope. It reflected my tears, but also beckoned me to smile. And the exuberance of its conclusion let me know that I could ultimately overcome the swirling mess of my life too. I needed that sense of hope to make it, and I found it in that piece of music. As you can tell, that music was pretty important to me.

An interesting thing happened several years ago connected to this same piece of music—in fact, two things happened. The first is this: I was at the Baltimore Symphony with some friends when Mahler's First Symphony was on the program. I was telling the two couples before the concert started that this was my favorite piece of symphonic music in college. And they said, "Oh". I couldn't believe it. All they could say was "Oh"? And I quickly realized that this piece of music was very special to me... and just another piece of music to them. That piece of music summarized a very important and personal part of my life journey...and there was no way they

could understand. For me it was emotion-laden and full of meaning. For them, it was just another Mahler Symphony and some of them didn't even like Mahler. In fact, one of them slept through the whole thing!

I felt very alone for a while at that concert. Sitting in the middle of four good friends of twenty-some years at that point who had no idea what was going on inside of me... and one of them was sleeping! And even if I began to explain it, they would never understand or feel everything that I knew and felt. It was not that I was hiding it. It was not that I didn't want them to know. It is just that life is sometimes a very individual journey. At times, we have to be comfortable being alone. No other human being can ever completely experience what it is to walk in our shoes. But God can.

God is able to be that intimate with each one of us. God knows the hairs on our heads, and our every thought and desire. God has been there through every moment of our lives—every joy, and every sorrow. In fact, God even knows us better than we know ourselves, because we are humanly limited in our ability to know... and God is not.

Think about what Jesus says in the gospel reading today.

- He says: *There will be trials in your life; they're unavoidable, even if you live in a relatively peaceful time. Suffering and death are part of the human story. Bodies grow old and pass away. But the reality of being mortal should not fill you with dismay. Do not lose hope, and do not fear the unknown. It is known to me, and I am with you—not just for one day but all days, even to the end of your life. And when you reach that final passage, I will show you the way, because I am the way. When it is God's time for you, do not be afraid of passing over.*
- Jesus says: I give you words of warning and promise. The warning: *humans cannot completely read the future. That limitation was true for me when I was among you in the flesh. For instance, we know that we shall die, but not how or when. The point is: God knows, and what is needed is trust. I say it again: what is needed is trust.*
- And Jesus makes a promise: *the world passes away for everyone in death, but a new world begins. That which has been temporal, measured by time, now becomes eternal. What you*

know in part, you will eventually understand in full. And this is because you have loved. Whoever loves belongs to my Father, and will not be overcome by death.

That's the message of Jesus in the gospel today. And you know what I discovered that night at the symphony, sitting in the middle of four friends? That I believe it. I believe what Jesus says. I cling to that hope. I am peaceful in that trust. I am sustained by that love. It happened while I was sitting there. I mentioned that two things happened to me at the symphony, and the first was discovering how alone I was in remembering the poignancy of that piece of music for me. The second thing that happened was discovering that Mahler's First Symphony does not have that same power for me any more. I really wanted to feel it, the way it used to feel. I was anticipating it, almost yearning for it-- but it didn't happen. It was still a great piece of music,, but God has taken its place in my life.

God has taken the place of Mahler's First Symphony for me. It is God who knows my condition, better than I do, and lifts me out of myself. It is God who reflects my tears and leads me to smile. It is the resurrection of Christ that reassures me that I can overcome the swirling mess of my life and the world. It is now Christ who gives me a sense of hope to keep going when that seems impossible. This was clear the other night at home in listening to this same piece of music again.

It still is a great symphony. But I don't need it now in the same way. And I suspect that all of us in the course of our lives look to other things and people and experiences instead of looking to God. Perhaps God even uses those opportunities to speak to us through those other things and people and events. But we are not enjoying the fullness of eternal life right here and now if we are not actually interacting with God. I was being led to God whenever I listened to Mahler's First in college, but I didn't really know God very deeply or personally yet.

You know, sometimes you need a word from God and your music isn't available. The greatest thing now is that I don't need that music anymore! I pray today that each one of you knows God in this same way... or are at least beginning to recognize in your life the people and things and

experiences through which you may begin to discover that God who is always reaching out to us through Christ.