

February 07, 2021 Not Just A Miracle Worker: In 1970, over fifty years ago, the rock opera *“Jesus Christ Superstar”* was first recorded to wide acclaim. It was the work of two songwriters, Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. Rice, a self proclaimed atheist and a cynic, held people of faith in disdain. The words of the songs he composed often reflect his hostility and clearly show his incredulity regarding the passion and death of Christ.

Consider the song “Herod’s Dream”. In this scene the king encounters Christ for the first time. He regards him as a mere curiosity, one not to be taken seriously, and an utter waste of time. The words of the song speak loudly of his skepticism.

“Jesus, I am overjoyed to meet you face to face
You’ve been getting a name all over the place
Healing cripples, raising the dead and now I understand that you are God
At least that what you said
So you are the Christ, the great Jesus Christ
Prove to me you are divine, change my water into wine
That’s all you need do, then I know it’s all true”.

Jesus refused his impertinent request. He remained silent, refusing even to acknowledge Herod’s words. Herod showed no interest in Christ’s message and was furious that Jesus showed him no respect and offered him no response. At the end of the song Herod cries, “You’re a joke, you’re not the Lord. You are nothing but a fraud.”

In the New Testament, the miracles of Jesus presuppose faith. It is only on condition of faith that Our Lord performs a work of power. Those who sought only to test or exploit Jesus’ power would never be acknowledged by him. In the sixth chapter of Mark’s gospel, we learn that Jesus could not work miracles in his hometown of Nazareth “so much did their lack of faith distress him”. (Mk. 6:5) Elsewhere Jesus offers words of rebuke, “This is a evil age. It seeks a sign”.

On the other hand, those who came with a sincere faith totally willing to accept Jesus and his mission and to act on that faith are healed. Many of them became his disciples. In today’s reading we are told that those close to Jesus, his first disciples, told him about Peter’s mother in-law, who was sick with a fever. They brought him to her. Jesus acted with alacrity. “He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up.” She did not refuse his hand. Their confidence in him was amply rewarded.

The late biblical scholar and Presbyterian minister William Barclay, has some deep insight into today’s gospel. He wrote the following reflections:

“But there is the beginning of tragedy here. The crowds came, but they came because they wanted something out of Jesus. They did not come because they loved him; they did not come

because they had caught a glimpse of some new vision; in the last analysis they wanted to use him. That is what everyone wants to do with God and his Son. For one prayer that goes up to God in days of prosperity, ten thousand go up in time of adversity. Many a man who has never prayed when the sun was shining began to pray when the cold wind comes.”

Jesus is much more than a miracle worker. His words are what are most essential. Recall one of his temptations in the desert was to turn stones into bread. He refused Satan’s blandishments. He said, “One does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God”. (Mt. 4:4) And there is no guarantee that a miracle will necessarily lead to faith. Some of those who witnessed his miracles cried out for him to be crucified on the day before his death.

Jesus constantly appeals for faith on the part of his hearers. To be a credible witness to Jesus means to trust in his words; it means to respond to his challenge to repent and to believe in the gospel. Jesus wants our trust.

He is counting on us!

Amen!