

Bruce Jenner. Caitlyn Jenner. Which is it or who is he or she? I don't know other than he was born as man and competed as a man in the 1976 Olympics, and won the gold medal in the men's decathlon. Yet, today he claims he has always felt that he was always a woman. I, nor anyone else, cannot dispute his feelings. Feelings are always personal and individual. However, feelings are not always in sync with reality.

Many people feel they are lost, unloved, unimportant, un-whatever. But if they were able to objectively examine their lives, they would see that their feelings about themselves are most likely over-exaggerated. And that's the problem with feelings; they are subjective; they have their origin and remain in the realm of the individual. And I don't care who you are, we all tend to view ourselves through the lens of our feelings. This not to say we should ignore our feelings, but rather, we need to realize our feelings can often be at odds with reality. And this is where we need to put our feelings to the test.

Take Jesus for instance. Jesus, over the course of his life leading up to his public ministry must have felt he was different. You don't just wake up one morning and decide you are the Son of God. But by the time Jesus was about thirty years of age, he began to test his feelings about himself and his relationship with the Father openly in public. Today's gospel reveals the results of one of those tests. And it didn't go well; at least on the surface. Jesus was shunned by most of his "homies."

But if we look more closely at our gospel, we see that his home-folk did acknowledge his extraordinary wisdom and the deeds he had wrought by his hands. There was indeed something “different” about Jesus; even according to those who took “offense” at him. And on top of that, despite the lack of faith he encountered, he still was able to perform some miracles for those who did not openly reject him.

Jesus tested his feelings about himself, and although he encountered resistance, even those who resisted, affirmed much of what he felt. St. Paul, in our second reading, also felt there was something about himself that kept him from being the disciple he wanted to be. Paul even asked the Lord to remove this “thorn in his side.” What this thorn was, no one knows. Scholars suggest it may have been a speech impediment, epilepsy, or recurring temptation. But whatever it was, the Lord does not let Paul use it as an excuse to keep him from continuing his ministry. The Lord tells him matter of factly, ““My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”

What a great message; not only for Paul, but for all of us who “feel” limited in some way. Notice that God does not say, “Hey, get over it.” Our Lord acknowledges Paul’s feelings (as well as ours) but says: “Look, you are more than your feelings. Your feelings do not define you. And my grace will help you realize that your perceived shortcomings do not define you.”

Feelings are part of what make us human. They allow us to relate, sympathize, and support one another. However, feelings do not outright define us. They need to be tested in the realm of objective love. I realize that there is not a human storefront of objective love we can just walk into for an assessment. The closest thing we have is the Church, our community. While it is filled with flawed persons, the Holy Spirit does live there, and with time and trust, the Spirit will speak the truth, because God who is objective in his love for us, has guaranteed it.

My hope is that we can all have the courage to seek God's voice in Scripture as well as in our community, and not allow our feelings alone to corner us into defining ourselves as something we are not. God our Creator has told who we are; we are his beloved children, now and always, despite how we feel. May we always hold on to, trust, and believe this fact.