

Leopold Bloom was here.

Only a handful of people showed up for our Sunday session last month on the Liturgical Readings for July. But that's all right. Missed opportunities are part and parcel of our lives. And besides Christ, rather than *demand* our attention tends rather to insinuate his way into our lives in the manner of Leopold Bloom. Who is Leopold Bloom? He's a character in James Joyce's famous Irish novel *Ulysses* – a baptized Dublin Jew and an outcast, even though he was born in Dublin and spoke with a brogue. But more than that, he's a Christ figure, good, down to earth, caring, bearing insult graciously – and as such he figures greatly in the ultimate redemption of the young, potentially alcoholic Stephen Dedalus.

Like Christ, Bloom doesn't come on strong. For most of the novel he's just beyond the peripheral vision of Stephen who is preoccupied with other things, caught up on the one hand with a bunch of Irish nationalists and on the other with party animals. His connection to Stephen first comes into play as Bloom, seated with Stephen's father in the cab of a funeral procession, points out Stephen, who is walking on the sidewalk with his cronies, and says, "There's a friend of yours. Your son and heir."

Then later as Stephen is leaving a newspaper office with a few older journalists en route to a pub, Bloom intrudes to seek an editor's advice on an ad – then quickly fades from view. Later again, as Stephen discusses Shakespeare with some snobs in a chamber of the Dublin Library, Bloom again intrudes seeking a librarian's guidance on some research – appearing as nothing more than a silhouette outside a half open door. Buck Mulligan refers to him as "the sheeny" and says to Stephen, "He knows you." And so Christ under the guise of Bloom continues to shadow Stephen.

Finally as the evening of the same day settles in, Bloom shows up at a hospital out of concern for a friend who's about to give birth and while waiting for news is invited into a room where again Stephen is engaged in loud talk and a drinking match with several intern friends. Out of that scene Stephen then goes cascading into the red light district of Dublin for more partying – at which point Bloom shifts into higher gear, pursues him and eventually picks him up out of a gutter, takes him home, holds a kind of Eucharist with shared cocoa, sobers him up, engages him in wise and far ranging conversation – and finally moves Stephen to renew his trust in his worth and his calling to be a creative human being.

Leopold Bloom is often here at St. Leo's on weekends - in the Benziger Room. By that I mean Christ is here, at the periphery of your vision, offering one of those many opportunities the parish supplies to bring you to a deeper understanding of his Gospel – so that he might gradually bring you to a turning point in your life. But not to worry. Legitimately preoccupied though you may be, he will quietly, persistently remain a character in your life story – unless he gets impatient and decides to pursue you and me no longer like the gentle Bloom but as Francis Thompson's "Hound of Heaven" of whom the poet says: *I fled Him down the nights and down the days; / I fled Him down the arches of the years; . . . I hid. . . from those strong Feet that followed . . . / But with unhurrying chase, / They beat – and a Voice beat / More instant than the Feet – "Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me."* There will be a few more Sunday sessions on the monthly Liturgical Readings and other such religious education opportunities in coming months here at St. Leo's.

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