

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, May 23rd 2013

Here in the middle of the United States, we are finally into spring – at least in our area it has been a struggle for flowers and trees to blossom. I always think of spring as symbolic of hope and new life. It is a forerunner and taste of the beauty that is to follow. For me, the enjoyment of the flowers is directly related to how well I planned and the time I spent in preparation last fall and winter.

Our readings today are also about hope and the rewards of the future. Similar to my flowers, such rewards and hopes depend upon the preparation. We are warned in the first reading to not be smug – to not take anything for granted. The rewards we will reap are directly connected to the relationships we establish. The care that we put into our relationship with God will be clearly reflected in our final rewards. We cannot put off beginning that relationship, the first reading reminds us: “Delay not your conversation to the Lord, put it not off from day to day. . .”

The responsorial psalm reiterates the blessings (rewards) of those who hope in the Lord and act accordingly. When we live the way Jesus showed us, all sorts of positive outcomes can be expected both on this earth and beyond. Conversely, the last stanza of the psalm speaks to the “wicked” as did the first reading – the outcomes will not be pleasant.

I have always been uncomfortable with this particular gospel. The words coming from the gentle, loving Jesus seem out of place to me. In the vernacular of today, I am used to Jesus as a strength builder, one who always builds on our strengths – points out the good and what we should do to continue growth. Here, our shortcomings are definitely brought to light with clear directives about what to do about them. We are challenged to recognize them and take decisive action to change. There is no sugar coating or focus on what we do well. The symbolism of plucking one’s eye is dramatic and attention getting. We are certainly not expected to self-mutilate rather to symbolically cut/remove those areas/intentions/ temptations from our lives.

For myself, I find the most effective way is the positive approach – fill the spaces with positive thoughts/deeds/people – filling my life with exposures that result in choices that are good. I try to listen to uplifting music and stay away from the “music” genre that disrespects women and life in general. I try (this one is harder for me) to stay away from television shows that are focused in violence and instead watch the old wholesome shows in reruns on some of the stations. Still, the bottom line is that it is my responsibility to live my life appropriately – focusing on doing “good” and walking the talk of Christianity. If I am to follow Christ, I must then walk in his footsteps.

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