

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jun 23rd 2013

PRE-PRAYERING

Recently I attended a conference where speakers did their best to inform as well as delight us. At the conclusion of each presentation there would occur the custom of applauding. The beginning of the clapping seems quite spontaneous. I became aware of just when we began not clapping. I wondered if I were the center and decider, so it seemed that when I stopped, everybody else did too. Ah, what an ego! I found myself wondering who decides when enough is enough of showing our approval. Strange how my mind ponders such things.

God makes great speeches and delightful presentations. Just sometimes we applaud when one thing or person or event catches our eye or heart and we smile, or even nod our heads; we seldom clap for joy at them. I do know that we can stop clapping or smiling quite quickly though. A new worry or need, or distraction of some kind gets me looking for new ways that God must inform or delight me. I stop clapping for God easily and I am not sure I even decide to do that. My hands stop smacking each other and I find them extended outward to get more - new - helpfully assisting my journey. If I see it and delight in it, well then the clapping begins again.

As we live the Eucharistic mission, having extended our hands to receive the Real Presentation of Jesus, we might prayerfully check if we are enjoying the mission or merely waiting for the next big delight to attract us for a while.

REFLECTION

Our First Reading for this liturgy is an oracle or prophetic poem using images for easy remembering. The whole chapter is a promise from God to restore and protect Jerusalem and the Davidic dynasty. Other people will try to attack and destroy Jerusalem, but God promises that they will fail.

What we hear is that God will pour out upon Jerusalem a spirit of attentiveness to the presence of God and God's protective care.

The center of this Reading is a familiar picture of grieving and mourning over someone who has been pierced and who has died. This image is picked up in John's Gospel referring to the condition of Jesus at his Passion. It is obviously convenient to assume that these verses were prophetically aimed at Jesus and the manner of his death.

The spirit poured out on Jerusalem will bring an awareness that by their national or cultic sins they have offended or "pierced" the image of the loving God. They will be moved to grief as one does when viewing the death of a little child. They will be able to mourn over how they have violated God's laws and love. On that day the spirit that God will send upon them will bring them to their religious senses and they will again know who God is and who they are, that is, protected and cared for. The "fountain" of that love will allow them to be purified and cleansed for a fruitful and long-lasting future.

The Gospel for today has a tone of the present leading to the future. Jesus is pictured as praying with his disciples. They have been accompanying him for a while and so he asks them a "leading question." Peter seems to have come up with the correct answer when Jesus asks him directly: who do people say that Jesus is. Peter, who often has his foot in his mouth, this time, says quite clearly, words of definition and recognition. Jesus is the Christ, or Messiah, or Anointed of God. The definition is that Jesus prophetically announces that he will suffer at the hands of the religious authorities in Jerusalem, be killed and on the third day, rise. As if this were not enough for the disciples to begin packing up and leaving Jesus, he tells the disciples and others, that if they wish to follow him, it will be more than a walk in the park.

The concluding verses continue the theme of losing and finding. Picking up one's cross every day is not only personal, physical suffering, but more. The cross was a symbol of shame. There will be a shame in following Jesus. He knows that the religious leaders regard him as a shameful interruption of what holiness and relationship with God consists. His ways, words and provocations reveal him to be a disgrace to the people. Those who will follow Jesus will live those same ways and words and by doing so will be regarded as a disgrace and be rejected.

The context is that those who follow Jesus will lose their honor and experience shame, but will follow him into true honor in glory. Luke will follow this losing-honor, gaining-honor passage with the Transfiguration which is the picture of the glory to come for those who live their belief in him. Those who choose honor now by their conformity to the ways of the Pharisees and elders will receive the loss of that honor in the after-time.

In so many large and small ways, we are invited to insult, provoke, challenge the ways of the popular ways of seeking and grabbing life. “Honor is flashed off exploit” as G. M. Hopkins wrote and the exploits of Jesus did not ride on the rails of wide acceptance and personal celebration or establishment. In no way is it easy to follow the ways and life of Jesus. Every day there is something in us that wants recognition, celebration, acceptance and just a little slice of honor. We are attracted to gaining ourselves. The fountain of grace is available to us as well to detoxify ourselves and bathe in the freedom of revealing him by how we choose to do the exploits of the living, revealing God.

“The eyes of all look to You, Lord, and You give them their food in due season.” Ps. 145, 15

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