

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Aug 11th 2013

PRE-PRAYERING

There is the familiar saying, “What’s a nice guy like me doing in a place like this!” We may have all found ourselves in a similar frame of mind about being somewhere we’d rather not be or surprised at being exactly where we always dreamed of being.

Perhaps you have wondered the same thing while being in church and at the Eucharist. As celebrant I wonder often why all these people are here. I would love to ask each person. Their answers would be varied and some amusing. “It’s Sunday. That’s what I do on Sundays.” “She made me come.” “I need a silent place and maybe the homily will make some sense in my life.” “I like the feeling I get of being holy, and I like the music.” “I like the spirit there and all that is going on except the collection. “

As we are living along from one Eucharist to the next, we might pray with the honest question and the various answers we hear.

Whatever reasons we have for attending, celebrating, God will use those to get you right where God wants you and then sends you right where you can be a blessing.

REFLECTION

The Book of Wisdom has many differing sections all centered around God’s creation and love for the people of Israel. The Book of Genesis has two creation narratives presenting two differing theological positions current at the time. For the composer of this almost poetic book of Wisdom, the creation of Israel as the People of God was even a greater manifestation of God’s love than the creation of the universe.

What we hear today in our First Reading is a short direct address prayer and reflection about just how faithful the people of Israel’s history had been. They were in slavery in Egypt, but they kept faith in the Covenanting and faithful God. They kept faithful to their religious traditions and so found courage to persevere during the many years of slavery. God eventually punished the Egyptians and in the later verses, which we do not hear today from the same chapter, the people of Israel did not take vengeance on their former slavers.

These chapters near the end of the Book of Wisdom are a great praise-poem, based in history and as well a national self-celebration of their past. It is a general truth that the victors in a war tend, as time goes on, to exaggerate their own glories as a group. This is the basic theme of today's reading, God was very good and so were we. It is meant to be a history and a reminder of just who Israel was and desires to continue to be.

The Gospel follows Luke's relating how of much more importance each person is than the lilies of the field and birds of the air who are beautiful and known by God. Our reading opens with the affirming embrace that we already belong to God's flock and the treasure has already been given to us, so we need not fear about our eternal futures. What we hear has to do with the implications of our being so precious and cared for. The "kingdom" is being given to us who have faith in the Giver. If we do so trust, then our "treasure" does not rely on or support the temporal kingdom here on earth.

Jesus spends the remainder of our reading discussing implications of belonging to this other kingdom. Our preciousness in God's eyes is contrasted with the preciousness of material treasures. We get our value from the Creator and not the accumulation of other creatures. Our hearts desires will announce to which kingdom we belong. For what do we wait and with what degree of patience and watchfulness?

Jesus is an investment of God's love in us. We are invited to make a similar investment in the holiness of humanity and the dominion of God. As usual a parable makes the tension quite clear.

There is a master who has gone away, promising to return, but the when is indefinite. The servants who remain in the house are to act justly, live soberly, aware, and above all, expect the Master's return at any moment. This is a direct charge to the listening-disciples. The chapter from which these verses are taken opens with Jesus' speaking to his closest followers and reminding them to avoid "the yeast of the Pharisees". The disciples are the servants then in whom Jesus has invested the treasures of his teachings. Unlike the Pharisees they are to be faithful in tending the household and the men and maidservants of the household. The emphasis is on the living the teachings of Jesus until his return.

You might make a financial investment in some company and they might in turn think quite highly of their venture, because of your confidence. The company might conduct themselves by good management and produce a profit for you. On the other hand, it might think you have lost interest, or conduct business in such a way that you do not receive any interest for your investment.

God, in Christ, has bought into the human company. God invested totally in our human recovery. We believe in this and desire to live reverently and gratefully for this infinite affirmation of our company.

We can also live unjustly, unsoberly, unaware of our dignity and so deflate our value and the whole human operation. This is why the section before about the “lilies” is so important. Jesus calls us his flock and possessors of the whole investment portfolio. When we hear who we are through the stories, pictures and deeds of God for us, then we re-member ourselves to the company of Jesus. The real problem for us humans is having the faith that there is a kingdom to come in which we are to invest now and the payoff is in the “then” to come. There is the “here” and the “here-after”; where is our heart!

“O Jerusalem, glorify the Lord, who gives you your fill of finest wheat.”

Larry Gillick, S.J.