

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Sep 8th 2013

PRE-PRAYERING

“Satis” is the Latin word for “enough”. “Satisfaction” literally means “Making or doing enough”. “Enoughness” is a common personal demon which demands more than “enough”, but itself is never complete or okay. Golfers keep trying to be more than sufficient. Writers always are tempted to keep rewriting until the work is more than good. Ernest Hemingway, the American novelist, wrote that his greatest hope was to write one really good sentence a day.

In the spiritual life, that personal drive for satisfaction can result in disheartening feelings of not being, not doing, and so not feeling adequate. What is “enough” in our relationship with God and with each other? The answer is that God does not judge the quantity of the performance, but the quality of our persevering in the struggle for acceptance of the human limitednesses.

These days as we live toward the Eucharistic celebration, it would be good to pray with our being tempted to negativity, because our actions do not exceed our desires. We can pray with our patterns of “enoughness” and what a plot of quicksand that is for our spirits and our relationship with God.

REFLECTION

The chapter from which our First Reading comes for this liturgy opens with a direct prayer from the heart of King Solomon who experiences the tremendous weight of being King of Israel. He begs God by first praising God for being the Creator of all things. He then acknowledges his personal frailty and absolute dependence upon God’s gift of Wisdom. He knows the difficulties of governing the Jewish people and the prospects of building a new temple in Jerusalem.

What we hear from this chapter are the verses which follow this prayer. It is a meditative musing upon God’s ways and the problems humans have in figuring things out, both on earth and about God in heaven.

“The deliberations of mortals are timid.” Solomon is wondering how will he ever know how to do what is right in God’s plan if he, as with other humans, can hardly know what is right to do on earth. As King Mongkut reluctantly cries in the play, *The King and I*, “Tiz a puzzlement!”

Our human spirit so strives to intellectually capture what our senses bump into. As I write this, there is a space capsule landed on Mars. Its name is “Curiosity” and it is digging up little stones and analyzing the stones for hints of its history of life on that distant planet. Curiosity is our wanting to, needing to, know “What’s up Doc” out there, in there, over there. With great difficulty and expense we reach, not because we have a right to know, we have a thirst and hunger for possessing the earth. We stumble and with frustration seem to demand that we should also be able to send “Curiosity” rockets to God and figure that Planet out as well. Solomon kneels down in surrender and gratitude to God for the spirit of Wisdom that guides him in living with his own curiosity.

Solomon, at the end of this passage does surrender to the history of God’s having sent a spirit of holiness to assist our timid ponderings. It is not so much a “puzzlement”, but an ongoing relationship between our insufficiency and God’s loving care. Solomon rests from his worries, by reflecting that God has given the gift of Wisdom which does assist the straightening of what seems impossibly crooked.

Our Gospel reading is the conclusion to a major section of Luke’s presentation of Jesus’ teachings about who belongs at the wedding feast of heaven. Jesus has just told a parable about such a feast, to which many who were invited did not come and so the doors were opened to the physically injured and outcasts. When he finished this story someone at table said that the ones who eat at the heavenly banquet will certainly be blest. What we hear today is Jesus’ reply.

The first challenging statement involves hating the very closest relationships we have. We are to “hate” them all, and our very own lives, in order to follow him. Then Jesus ups the bar a little higher by saying that those who will be his disciples will have to carry their own crosses. Woe is me!

Jesus relates two little parables to finish off the discussion. If you are going to build a tower, you’d better have enough to finish or else. If you are going to wage war then you’d better have enough soldiers to win, or else. The chapter ends with two verses we do not hear today. Jesus talks about salt losing its flavor and when it does it gets thrown out. Jesus ends all this by reminding all who have ears to be listening.

Hating those we love and carrying our crosses is not real attractive. “Hating” is the exact Greek word Luke uses though. Jesus did put great emphasis on loving and being loved by parents and friends. Next Sunday’s Gospel will relate a great story about family love. So what can this “hating” mean?!!

That to which we are invited by Jesus is a wisdom about which we heard in the First Reading. All relationships of love are gifts from God and they are not meant to make gods out of those whom we love. How are we ever going to build our relationship with Jesus by loving God above all other relationships and also carrying crosses?! It is the “puzzlement” question; and the answer is “wisdom”.

How are we going to build a tower successfully or be on the victorious side when we feel so insufficient? Very early in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, we pray for “big-souled” generosity so as to be able to find and love the will of God. A temple in Jerusalem, a tower in the Gospel, a war waged against perhaps over-whelming odds; will we have enough, do enough, pray enough, so as to win!

It is about “salt” from the last verse which is not included today. Keeping our flavor lest it be lost and so we too. To follow Jesus is not a quantifiable, gradable thing. Each of us is given a salty wisdom which allows us to keep our ears and hearts open to the invitation. This involves not keeping our eyes on how we are doing and perhaps that very thing is what is the nature of the crosses we are to carry. Not any of us can love well enough. We do not do enough, feel enough, forgive enough, but we keep living, loving as we can and that keeps our salt from being thrown out. We cannot follow Jesus well enough, but we don’t throw ourselves away either, because we are not doing that well enough. “Large-soulness” is the gift of Wisdom which builds and wins and keeps us salty.

“Like the deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul is yearning for you, my God; my soul is thirsting for God, the living God.”

Larry Gillick, S.J.