

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Nov 23rd 2013

“I will rejoice in your salvation, O Lord.”

The Psalmist is looking to a future when rejoicing is possible -- I will rejoice; I will be glad. Today, though, there is an ambivalence. The Psalmist claims that enemies and obstacles are overcome, yet it is clear that the work of salvation is still unfinished. Has God rescued the forgotten needy? Are the afflicted finally saved?

In our own days, we might feel a bit of the same. Faith tells us that we are saved. Looking around, though, it often seems as though we are with those nations, “sunk in the pit”. Can we ever get out of it? And, if we are down in that pit, if our poor are forgotten, and our afflicted perishing, can we rejoice?

In today’s Gospel, Jesus invites us to a deeper understanding of how God is at work in the world in response to the hostile questioning of the Sadducees. These were not bad people. In fact, it might make sense to believe as they did, to hold to the Law, to find some semblance of salvation -- or justification, at least -- in the proper ordering of our community. (Something more than mildly attractive to this lawyer!). Yet, Jesus calls them -- and us -- to something more.

Notice he does not rebuke them. Nor does he tell them that they have misunderstood the Law. Rather, he changes the frame of reference. No longer is it merely about the proper ordering of society. Instead, it is about relationships and life. It is about the activity of God.

God is the God of the living. In this month of November, when we remember all the saints, all the faithful departed, and all the souls whose faith God alone knows, we can take heart in this. We can take heart that, for God, “all are alive.” For here our salvation is known. God is the God of life. God’s people are the People of Life. And our salvation is a deeper sense of life.

This might seem all too much abstraction. The resurrection of the dead seems far off. To be like angels is perhaps a nice idea, if a tad incomprehensible. The call, though, is not just for some far-off heavenly life. The gift, I think, is that we are alive with Christ, not just in the resurrection, but today. We can look for the resurrection with faithful Hope. Yet we also should be aware that the Gospel kingdom is appearing today.

Think of the stories of good deeds, of solidarity, of the women and men who stand for and with the poor and the needy. Even in the midst of a broken political and economic community, we see amazing acts of love, of charity, of hope, of life. In our daily lives, too, we might encounter the simple joys of a good meal with friends, a phone call from a faraway loved one, or just the beauty of a crisp autumn day. Today, we wait for the life to come. Rather than simply dismissing it as an abstract nonsense, or using it as an excuse to avoid the difficult realities of our everyday experiences, we can see God's amazing grace calling forth the new life in ourselves today. It can be small or big. The important thing is that God is here at work, calling us to be children of God, children of life.

And that is why we will rejoice in God's salvation. It is indeed easy enough to say that we will rejoice, but to fear that we cannot. We can look around and see the problems of the day, we can see our poor and needy, our afflicted, our nation and the world stuck in a pit. But we realize that God is the God of life. Thus we who are made God's children are, truly, the People of Life. Our salvation is precisely in this, that God is the God of Life, not death, "for to Him, all are alive."

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