

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Dec 6th 2013

Today is St. Nicholas Day. I am reminded of how much our responses are dependent on our background and context. I grew up in a very comfortable environment in the suburbs. The evening before St. Nicholas Day would involve putting up our special Christmas stockings on the fireplace. On the following morning I would find my stocking filled with candy and a check. (I grew up in an environment where a six year old appreciates a check.) My wife had a very different childhood. In a good year St. Nicholas Day meant mandarin oranges and nuts in her shoes. In a bad year it meant coal. (Yes, one year she really got coal.) My childhood built an environment of trust. Her childhood left her with concern. As I grew I found my trust erode as I had more interactions with people who did not have my best interest in mind. Violations of trust have always cut me deeply. Still I had a place where I could retreat for protection. My wife experienced challenges to her trust that were both more numerous and more severe. She came to expect this as the way that things were.

Trust in the Lord. This is a theme that we find in today's readings. The reading from Isaiah promises a better future to the faithful. The psalm assures us of protection and salvation. The Gospel offers healing growing out God's mercy and one's faith and trust.

My profession is based on problem solving. Physicists are taught to work hard struggling to find solutions both on individual and on team bases. We are encouraged to take matters into our own hands. This week needed a visit to a car dealership. I would like to say that trust in the Lord and his creation could get me through the experience. My feeling is that this was a situation where taking control was very justified.

I find it easier to think of my role as a co-creator. I find it easier to trust in my work in collaboration with God. I do admit that I find it simpler to resign myself to God's hands when I am overwhelmed.

I pray today for the openness to the future that the Lord offers to us.

This brings to the front another developmental difference between my wife and myself. I ended up being someone who is a better talker than listener. This works the same way in my prayer. I try to take charge even in my relationship with God. My wife is a very good listener. I wish I had that skill. It brings her a very different relationship with God. (It also is a great asset for her interactions with people.)

I pray for the ability to listen. I ask for the gift of attentiveness in my prayer.

I pray for the gift of trust.

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.”

Thomas Merton, Thoughts in Solitude

Michael Cherney