

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Feb 27th 2014

What Do We Love?

“Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers who harvested your fields are crying aloud.”
James 5:4

The words of James are harsh. The gold coveted by the rich will consume them. Their zeal for luxury murders the poor. Hearts grown fat with comfort will face the day of slaughter. The wages robbed from workers weep. The psalmist warns that those who trust in folly will never see the light.

Rabble rousers like this are rarely heard today. They would be labeled extremists and ignored. With everyone needing access to money, being rich and powerful has lost its taint. Just look at the names embedded in buildings, arenas, schools, operas, films, parks, museums, concerts, and libraries. Students race down the court with corporate logos flying from their uniforms, and they work out under donors’ names. Maybe the dollar proclaims “in God we trust,” but the song might be right: “money makes the world go round.” Only churches and children still are named after saints.

How do we recover the sharp edge of Scripture in a world like ours? The works of mercy rouse us to feed the hungry and shelter the homeless. The coat drive leaves us feeling warm. But the works of justice are a tougher sell. The struggles for fair wages or immigration reform take time; groups clash and compromise gets ridiculed. For many, political engagement feels like exile; they turn back to charity, where making a difference is easier to grasp.

The Gospel exhortations end with dire warnings: if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. Pope Francis exhorts in a different key. He urges us to open our doors and get out in the streets with those bruised and hurting. Behind our walls is security. To stand with those who struggle is joy. And it is joy that salts our life.

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