

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Mar 26th 2014

Today's readings are full of praise for God on account of the laws God gives to his people. Moses insists that God's statutes and decrees are just, that following them is a sign of the wisdom and intelligence of the people of Israel. For Jesus, obeying and teaching the commands of God's law reveals the greatness of the Kingdom. And the Psalmist sings praise, for God has revealed not only God's own self, but statutes and ordinances.

This may say more about me than about the Scriptures – alright, it certainly does – yet my first response to readings such as this is one of befuddlement. Laws, statutes, ordinances, and decrees. These do not seem to be cause for praise and rejoicing to me. They can be just and unjust, sure. Following them or not is a sign of a person's moral character. But, a source of praise? Maybe it is because I'm too close; I'm down at the courthouse pretty regularly, I deal with the frustrations and limitations of law and legal process quite regularly. Sure, we can anesthetize the readings by making them all about God's law being some abstract notion, or perhaps limit it solely to personal morality.

Yet, I cannot but notice that the laws are placed by Moses upon God's People. The Psalmist sings the praise of God who revealed to Israel, a nation, a people unlike other nations. And Jesus places the context of this saying not just in the keeping of the commandments, but in teaching others to keep them, or not. So, it is more than just personal morality.

And, it must be more than abstract, too. There should be a call here to concrete action, to a conversion, a new way of life. But, how can the law be this way?

I sat with that question for some time. Then, I recalled various clients. Some struggled with the legal system, with what was going on. But some, some found vindication, some found justice, some found relief. A mother reunites with a child hidden from her by a spiteful father. A young man given a second chance after a stupid mistake. A debtor realizes she can get relief from an immense burden. They found a reason to rejoice. For them, the law, however imperfect, was a source of justice and even life.

So this, I think, is the reason we can praise God for giving us his statutes and decrees. We are not praising some bureaucratic apparatus. Nor are we praising a system of dispute resolution or property protection. Rather, we realize that God calls us, as a people, and not just as a person, to a new life. God renews our whole community. God's laws are not something to be afraid of, but a source of consolation and joy, for they point us to the true reconciliation, the true justice, the true life that comes from being with God. Praise the Lord, Jerusalem!

Nate Romano, S.J