

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Apr 3rd 2014

Today we are ten days out from the beginning of Holy Week. It is a good time to renew our commitment to God and finish the penitential work that was begun on Ash Wednesday.

The readings today have one theme in common: the tendency for us to exchange what God offers us for something of lesser value and glory. St. Clare used the term “laudable exchange” to refer to giving up the things of earth for the things of heaven. However, our texts today warn us that we frequently do just the opposite.

In the first reading from Exodus the people have made a molten calf and are bowing down and worshipping it. They have exchanged the living God for a product of their own hands. Remember that it is these same people who saw the miracles that God performed in Egypt and at the Red Sea. God led them via a cloud in the day and a pillar of fire at night. How could anyone miss the fact that God loved them and was caring for them? Yet, God seemed so distant and they wanted something they could see and have close at hand. Thus, they made God to suit their specifications, to do what they needed done. One need only to read the text to see how this angered God and called for an intervention on the part of Moses to save their lives.

The psalmist refers to the incident recorded in Exodus and speaks of this exchange. He says that “they exchanged their glory for the image of a grass-eating bullock.” They exchanged their glory. Most commentators believe that this represents a scribal change from “the glory of God.” Scribes often did this to protect the name of God. Whether their glory is the original language of the psalmist or that of a later scribe, it states such an important truth: the only glory that we humans will ever have is the glory that comes from God, the glory that essentially is God. We have been made in the image and likeness of this glorious God and what a slap in God’s face when we exchange that glory and worship some creation of our own hands.

The gospel reading is too dense for us to take it up in any depth here but there is one part of it which relates to this theme of exchange. The leaders of the people reject Jesus and exchange his testimony, his life, for that of others. For a time they like John the Baptist but grow tired of him. If others come tooting their own horns, they listen to them. They are able to accept anybody and everybody but Jesus. They love Moses, or so they say. But would they have followed Moses or would they have been right in there helping to make a god out of pieces of gold?

St. Clare was right: it is a laudable exchange to give up the things of this earth and embrace God. This brings me full circle to Lent. During Lent we do certain penances such as giving up sweets or alcohol or electronic gadgets. We sometimes add on practices such as fasting or saying certain prayers. These

are wonderful disciplines. However, I must constantly remind myself that these disciplines should aid me in focusing on God alone. If my attention remains focused on these things, then how am I any different than the people in the days of Moses who exchanged a thing for their glory, namely, God?

Let us lift up our eyes from this earth to the glory of God. What a laudable exchange!

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