

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Jul 17th 2014

Today's readings reflect our experiences when, despite our good intentions, our desires are frustrated. We might will salvation for the earth (a tall order indeed), but we cannot deliver it. We cannot even deliver this to our own children, for goodness sake! When we feel most powerless, the transcendence of God becomes real to us and we call out for his help.

Isaiah's words reflect this time of crying out for God and his transcendent power, which is the opposite of our own impotence. Even what might seem to be our most transcendent act – bringing new life into the world -- can appear to us like giving birth to the wind. Even with our knowledge of the divine mystery that surrounds this wondrous event, we know that our ways always fall short. We depend on God for sustenance.

Isaiah expresses humanity's cry for God to rescue us from this precarious existence, where even our most meaningful events fall short of what we need. Please, come, dear Lord. This is a good place to be, because God will indeed come when we call for him. But too often we cannot recognize our need because we are drunk with our own visions of invincibility, satisfied with our achievements and the good gifts we have. Let us pray for a sober vision of reality instead. That would be a good start. From there, improvement is possible.

In the Gospel, we see Jesus supplying the answer to that prayer for divine assistance. Jesus tells us something astonishing: despite our questionable track record, he invites us to join him in accomplishing his work for the Kingdom of God. Really? Do you know who you are inviting to join this partnership, Jesus? Jesus somehow understands our predicament, and that we are frustrated in our own attempts to achieve the good we may be willing to happen. His words are very encouraging, indeed. Come. Really? Are you talking to me? When he tells us to take on his yoke, what does that mean? Is this a call to be joined together with others in the Christian community, rather than a call for "Jesus and me" to work together? I think so! This is not a validation of "Jesus and me in the basement", but a nudge toward the Church, warts and all!

When we think we are strong, when our illusions make us susceptible to believing we are powerful, we may think of ourselves as being free to do whatever pleases us. But when we look soberly, we may see no achievement worth counting. We see only our footprints, which soon disappear as the sand is blown by the wind. But we are meant for eternal significance, and we cry out to God for deliverance from meaninglessness, the preeminent disappointment that we experience along with our other, lesser maladies.

How do we respond to Jesus' call to join him? What does Jesus' call require of us? Let us ponder that today and see how we might take our place in the yoke and help to pull the wagon. And in so doing, may we find both meaning and significance. And we might even find the company of others who are pulling to be most enjoyable! What a pleasant surprise!

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