

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Oct 24th 2014

At the outset of today's gospel, Jesus seems to suggest the ease with which we can predict the weather. While professional meteorologists would protest that there is much more involved in weather casting than observing clouds and wind direction, Jesus' words express common wisdom and experience. While we tend to keep up with the weather—and we always have the Weather Channel to assist us—Jesus chides his listeners, including us, about our lack of discernment concerning what time it is. And about the implications of this discernment.

By “present time,” Jesus does not refer to a specific holiday or season of the year. Rather, he points to the perennial moment that his coming in the flesh to reveal God's love brings about. This is the “moment,” the ever-present invitation, to open our hearts to the divine love and mercy Jesus offers. Letting God's merciful love germinate, take root in, and mature in our inmost being is a life-long process, one that is nourished by prayer and the sacraments. One of the “fruits” of the appropriation of God's gracious mercy is our willingness and ability to be reconciled with one another. This is what Jesus suggests by the example he uses of settling with one's opponent. We manifest the divine gift of mercy and forgiveness by committing ourselves to what St. Paul calls the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18).

Today's first reading offers further insight into how to respond to the “present time.” Paul expresses this response as “to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received.” He goes on to list three virtues or attributes that God's Spirit empowers—humility, gentleness, and patience. By humility, Paul means recognizing and living out of the fundamental truth of our lives, namely that we are created in God's image and blessed with many gifts. True humility ultimately issues in gratitude to God and in generosity, as we share with others God's goodness to us. Gentleness denotes the way of being with and treating others that Jesus manifested during his ministry. It is a fruit of compassion, and is in reality a mark of true strength, not of weakness. Patience entails giving others the time and space to grow into God's merciful love. It calls forth bearing with one another through love. The juxtaposition of readings thus proposes that recognizing the “present time” calls for growth in humility, gentleness, and patience.

Paul also suggests another appropriate response: striving for unity. The passage from Ephesians beautifully sets forth a vision of communion, of *koinonia*—one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. This vision is not just an ideal, but rather a reality we are helped by God to enact. Division, alienation, marginalization, and violence are the antithesis of what God's kingdom is about. We are called to be agents of peace and reconciliation (there's that word again). And that starts close to home, in our families, our workplaces, our communities. Such is at the heart of what Pope Francis is calling us to when he reminds us that we are all to be evangelizers.

So, as the days get shorter and the colder winds come from the north (at least here in the northern hemisphere), we are invited to keep our focus on Jesus and the “present time” he brings to us: the time to let our hearts expand in receiving God’s merciful love; the time to grow in humility, gentleness, and patience; the time to strive for the unity and peace of God’s kingdom; the time to be the people that longs to see God’s face.

Tom Stegman, S.J.