

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Jan 13th 2015

While the Universal Church simply calls this a Tuesday In Ordinary time it also acknowledges an ancient memorial of the sainthood of Hilary of Poitiers, a Bishop of the Fourth Century who remained faithful to the Doctrine of the two natures of Christ when many Christians around him were falling into the heresy of Arianism (the denial of Jesus' Divinity). Hilary, like his episcopal peer in the East, St. Athanasius, was both a Bishop and a brilliant theologian, gentle in human demeanor, it is reported, but loyal to the teachings of the Gospel. For this he suffered exile from his diocese in the Western part of the Roman Empire (what is today France) when he was deported, with his wife and family, to what is today Syria. Hilary was a young married presbyter when he was elected Bishop of the diocese of Poitiers and for much of the rest of his life negotiated the tasks of husband and father with service to the Church, and theological writing. His staunch orthodoxy did not inhibit his ability to minister compassionately to all who needed spiritual care, nor did his marriage and family commitments inhibit his generous concern for the poor and outcasts of his culture.

The readings today, though part of the synchronous cycle of year 1 of the daily lectionary, reflect much of what Hilary sought to defend. The passage from Hebrews is a complex echo of the Incarnation readings that we have been contemplating throughout the Advent/Christmas cycle. It is God who is the creator of humanity – who has made humanity a partner in the creation and salvation of the rest of the created order. And it is through incarnation in human nature that God entered the created order and joined us in our suffering and death.

Sometimes either in our efforts to control or dominate nature or, conversely, in our very important efforts to recognize, defend and protect the goodness of all the created order, we lose sight of the role that humanity has as steward and servant of creation both by virtue of the authority of our relationship with God through the Incarnation, and the humbleness of our relationship with created nature as one with it (“we are dust and unto dust we shall return”).

The Gospel points to the authority with which Jesus spoke and acted, an authority that flowed from his “being” and “doing” as much as from what he said. His embrace of God's spoken and written word, and his interpretation of it from the life of compassion that he lived offer us a way to understand our vocation of partnership in “living into” God's reign by imitating Jesus' humanity through the grace supplied by his divinity. Our authority to serve and save the created order hinges on our participation in bringing about God's reign, on earth as it is in heaven by serving one another and all of creation in the manner that Jesus did.

Whatever our service vocation (ordained, married, parenting, teaching etc.) our baptismal vocation births us into a union with Jesus' humanity and divinity that empowers us with the powers to share in

Jesus' authority of proclaimer of God's Will (prophet), healer of God's creation (priest) and servant of God's people (king) which should simply take our breath away with the humbling and ennobling truth that Psalm 8 proclaims today:

“You have made [humans] little less than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor.”

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