

## Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Jan 20th 2015

Our crisp new wall calendar tell us that the Christmas season is over. Our liturgical calendar tells us we are in the second week of “ordinary” time. In the Northern Hemisphere our environmental calendar tells us we are only a third of the way into winter. This time after the excitement and joy of Christmas can begin to feel downright dreary. In a word, it can make us feel sluggish. Today’s letter to the Hebrews cautions against this state of being -- don’t be a slug, hold onto hope!

A few years ago around this time, my family gave me the birthday gift of seeing a two-person stage performance of CS Lewis’s *The Screwtape Letters* in San Francisco. In this quick and witty take on the myriad workings of temptation away from hope in our lives Lewis writes, “And Nothing (capital “N”) is very strong: strong enough to steal away a man’s best years not in sweet sins but in a dreary flickering of the mind over it knows not what and knows not why...Indeed, the safest road to Hell is the gradual one -- the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.” It can be tempting during this “ordinary” time to quickly lose our grip on the joy and wonder of Christmas we just experienced less than one month ago.

In his Christmas greeting to the Curia on December 22nd Pope Francis cautioned all of us who make up the Body of Christ to avoid at all cost “spiritual Alzheimer’s disease.” This post-Christmas time when we are already struggling to stay committed to our New Year’s resolutions can be wrought with forgetfulness, a loss of hope and even a sense of resignation to that which draws us away from God. Francis says, “We see it in those who have lost the memory of their encounter with the Lord; ... in those who build walls and routines around themselves, and thus become more and more the slaves of idols carved by their own hands.”

As he so often has said, Francis offers the antidote to this malaise -- JOY! “Let us not lose that joyful, humorous and even self-deprecating spirit which makes people amiable even in difficult situations,” he tells the Curia and us. We must tend to our hope, even when we forget the sweet taste of life in times of gloom and sluggishness. Let hope be for us “an anchor of the soul.” (Heb 6:19) As we notice ourselves getting sucked into that which is slowly, sluggishly pulling us into the muck of malaise and the quicksand of resignation, let us feel the weight of that anchor of hope taking hold in the deep waters of God’s covenantal love with us.

Perhaps a daily anchor for us can be one which Pope Francis said he uses daily in his life -- a prayer attributed to St. Thomas More:

“Grant me, O Lord, good digestion, and also something to digest. Grant me a healthy body, and the necessary good humour to maintain it. Grant me a simple soul that knows to treasure all that is good and that doesn’t frighten easily at the sight of evil, but rather finds the means to put things back in their place. Give me a soul that knows not boredom, grumbling, sighs and laments, nor excess of stress, because of that obstructing thing called ‘I’. Grant me, O Lord, a sense of good humour. Allow me the grace to be able to take a joke and to discover in life a bit of joy, and to be able to share it with others.” ?

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