

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Feb 17th 2015

As I reflect on the readings for today, the day before Lent begins, I am reminded of the importance of trust in a relationship with God. Each one about trusting in God and acting with love.

The symbol of the flood is familiar in our theology of Baptism: a cleansing, a promise to become our best selves for God. God “was grieved” that there was such “wickedness on earth.” The flood was not destruction for its own sake, or simply because God was powerful enough to do it. God wanted to save creation through the flood; after all, he had found it very good in the beginning, and still found goodness in it with Noah and his family. Noah had a strong relationship with God that enabled him to act out of love rather than out of a desire for power. God implicitly asks Noah for a great deal of trust when he gives the instructions for the ark – through that trust, Noah and his family are saved.

The psalm highlights a fairly compelling reason to trust God (which Jesus will ask us to do out of faith in the Gospel reading). The verses praise God’s majesty and power, thundering over creation, while the antiphon speaks of the peace God gives to us, God’s people. Power and peacefulness do not usually coexist in individuals or institutions in our world. But, God is powerful beyond our understanding, and yet somehow still wants to give us peace. God has our best interests at heart and acts for us out of love.

Jesus tries to teach his disciples that truth in the Gospel reading. He warns them of the “leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod,” who in yesterday’s Gospel had asked him for signs in order to prove he was speaking on behalf of heaven. To paraphrase, Jesus says, “Didn’t you see what I just did back there, feeding that huge crowd with seven loaves of bread? That was a sign, people!! How did you not get that? Open your eyes! The signs are happening right in front of you!” One gets the impression they might not have heard the thunderous glory of God mentioned in the psalm, even in the downpour of the flood. The signs the Pharisees and Herod asked for were tests of power. The signs Jesus did were out of love: he wanted to care for the crowds in their need.

The challenge for us, then, is to trust in God’s will even without a grand display of power to help our faith along. Jesus calls us to wake up to the acts of love God is already doing in our lives. When we focus on returning to God tomorrow, that trust will be important. We, like Noah, might not know exactly what awaits us when we follow God’s will.

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