

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Mar 27th 2015

“In my distress I called upon the Lord, and he heard my voice.”

This psalm response comes at a good time for me. It is a reminder to let go of stress before it becomes distress. As we all know, stress from job, relationships, the larger community, life in general can weigh on us and cause us to worry and fret. Stress generally makes most of us uncomfortable, unhappy, and in cases physically and emotionally ill. If left unresolved, or if ignored, over time stress can lead to “distress” and manifest itself in feelings of pain and suffering.

So it is good for the psalmist to remind us that the Lord will hear our voices when we call out in distress. Does the Lord make the stress go away? Not really. If you are stressed because of a job, or financial issues, or a rocky relationship, or if you feel stressed because of poverty, or immigration, or the death penalty, or the threat of war or terror, the Lord doesn't remove those stressors from your life.

So what does the psalmist mean by saying the Lord hears our voices? Is God a sounding board, absorbing all the prayers of humankind, cataloging them in an unimaginably large databank? We share our woes with the Lord – how does that help relieve stress?

One way, I think, is that knowing the Lord hears enables us to have perspective. Our stresses seem pretty large to us as individuals, but are not terribly significant in the grand creation of the universe. Knowing the Lord listens can provide us with a calming sense of the true insignificance of our current worries.

The Lord also listens by sending us examples of how to handle stresses. Jesus is perhaps the greatest example. He has reminded us of the need to let go of worry – the parable of the birds singing without a care in the world is a beautiful reminder of the grace of detachment from worries and cares. Note also what He does in today's reading from John, challenging the accusers to evaluate the works done in the Lord's name. Jesus rhetorically asks – “How can I not be who I say I am and still perform the miracles that I do?” This causes us to think – what actions do I take and how do people understand who I am by those actions? What can I DO in reaction to the stresses in my life, and how can I make a difference in reducing these concerns? My mother's old saying “God helps those who help themselves” is a reminder that we can reduce stress by acting in concert with God.

The Lord also listens by inviting us to let go of our stresses – to turn them over to the Lord, our rock of refuge. To do this requires us to give up control of our stresses and to let the Lord “own” them. It requires us to have the faith to let go, to believe that the worries of our everyday lives are insignificant in God’s wonderful design. Recall a time when a stressor was removed from your life, and the relief you felt. Isn’t that what God calls us to do through the psalmist?

So, Lent can be a time when we are reminded of these things – when through our prayer and fasting and good works and repentance we identify the stressors in our lives, when our faith grows so we can turn them to the Lord. Lent reminds us of our dependence on the Lord for all the truly meaningful succor and sustenance of our lives – the peace that comes from reunion with our Creator God by our conscious and faithful surrender to our call from our Lord.

And so my prayer today is that through my Lenten prayer, fasting, good works and repentance, I might receive the grace to surrender my stresses to the Lord and thus live the life God calls me to.

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