

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Aug 10th 2015

Feast of Saint Lawrence, deacon and martyr

Today is the feast of Saint Lawrence, who was martyred in the early third century. He is remembered for his care for the poor, whom Lawrence once characterized as the treasure of the Church, as well as for his courage and faithfulness, even unto death.

Acts of kindness and courage are an important part of the Christian tradition handed down from generation to generation, which informs our faith and our conduct. As Yves Congar once wrote, “Education does not consist in receiving a lesson from afar, which may be learned by heart and recited, thanks to a good memory, but in the daily contact and inviting example of adult life, which is mature, confident, and sure of its foundations” Much of what is most important in our life is caught, not taught.

Today’s readings amply reinforce the life of Lawrence, particularly his generosity and liberality with his goods and his life. The metaphor of sowing and reaping is a familiar one, but perhaps we might pause and consider the gift that sowing entails. In the days before seeds were specially purchased and packaged for planting, the farmer took seed from the wheat he had stored up from the prior year. This is a profound act of faith: the wheat would no longer be available for food, but would instead be put into the ground. There are many perils for the planted crop, and no guarantees. But the gift – parting with the wheat and taking that risk – was the only path forward toward a sustainable supply of food for his family and livestock. That wheat stored up in the bin won’t last forever. There is ultimately no security apart from this risk-taking, self-disciplined vulnerability manifested in the act of sowing.

We moderns sow differently, but we also recognize the benefit of prudent risk-taking. The Gospel also tells us that we have to sow our very lives – and that is a whole different ballgame. How fearfully we approach this task! We often don’t see the return from this kind of investment, and some might even find it imprudent. We are reluctant to take that seed out of the bin and put it into the ground. But how foolish this way of thinking is! Our lives on this earth are like that wheat in the bin – they don’t last forever, either. We are all wasting assets that need to be used in order to produce some value.

Whether we rust out or wear out, we are eventually going out! There is no security apart from giving ourselves to God.

I fear aspiring to the example of Lawrence, as I know that I probably cannot measure up. And even Lawrence is an inferior imitator of our Lord, even though we all think he did pretty well. This imitation must be our own, and it is the product of a lifetime full of choices. To draw again from Yves Congar, “A child receives the life of the community into which he enters, together with the cultural

riches of the preceding generations (tradition!), which are inculcated by the actions and habits of everyday life.” Thanks be to God for His mercy, which we all need so desperately. May He help us to grow everyday actions and habits of generosity and liberality that will enrich His kingdom, changing ourselves and enriching the culture for our posterity in the process.

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