

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Sep 26th 2015

The first reading gives us a description of a part of Zechariah's vision. He sees someone measuring a place for the temple. Jerusalem is pictured as a vast city without walls under God's protection. Historically Zechariah is in a period after the Babylonian exile. A good fraction of the Jews had returned. Rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem had started, but it has slowed to a stop for political reasons. Zechariah is seeing a new future for God's holy place. He sees a place that will prosper under God's protection.

The responsorial canticle takes us to an earlier point in biblical history. The northern kingdom of Israel is occupied. Jeremiah sees a future with freedom regained with the Lord as Israel's protector.

Jesus foretells his fate in Gospel. This leaves the disciples confused, but afraid to ask for an explanation. As background to the place of this episode in the chronologically of Luke's Gospel, this prediction follows Jesus liberating a possessed boy after his disciples had failed. It also comes immediately before the disciples engage in an argument over which of them is the greatest.

I can imagine myself in the context of the Gospel in the role of one of Jesus' disciples. I see Jesus as a charismatic leader. He gives us what seems to be an enigmatic statement - "Pay attention to what I am telling you. The Son of Man is to be handed over to men." I can imagine my confusion as someone who did not know the later chapters of Jesus' story. I can imagine my desire to ask Him to explain. I wonder why someone else does not. I picture myself standing quietly. Our abilities had just been put to the test and had failed with the possessed boy. We, the disciples, are positioning ourselves for an argument as to who is the alpha male. I can imagine myself feeling that it is best not to ask Jesus what he meant out of a fear of looking ignorant.

Reflecting on my life today, I think how often I have not spoken or not acted out of a fear of looking foolish. There are psychologists (and political advisors) who will claim that fear is the primary motivation for everything. Fear of failure and fear of embarrassment become more personally important the more that we derive our self worth on the basis of how others perceive us. I am reminded of a quote from an old Albert Brooks movie, *Defending Your Life*: "Fear is like a giant fog. It sits on your brain and blocks everything -- real feelings, true happiness, real joy. They can't get through that fog. But you lift it, and buddy, you're in for the ride of your life." History, as embodied in today's first reading and the response, does not promise an easy ride, but it does offer God as a protector on the way. My prayer today is for liberation from the paralysis that fear may bring.

Dear Lord,

I ask for wisdom to know your ways and my purpose.

I ask for the courage to act in your service.

I ask for the ability to listen and to discern.

I ask for knowledge to avoid sins of commission.

I ask for the fortitude to avoid sins of omission.

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