

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Oct 23rd 2015

The Promise and the Lie

“Let your compassion come to me that I may live, for your law is my delight.” (Psalm 119:77)

We are not strangers to struggle. From war-torn lands come refugees seeking a place where their children might live. Some nations respond swiftly; others refuse to act. Heeding these cries for help would be costly and dangerous, they say.

Beneath public dispute are struggles that unfold within us. Instead of a harmonious self, the person splits into factions. For the Manicheans, the self is a battleground where either good or evil prevails in the end. Augustine rejects the view that makes me a bystander to my life. It is I who take opposing paths. It is I who pleads: ‘Give me chastity, but not yet.’ It is my will that waffles. Paul wonders why I do not do what I want. I want to preserve the earth for our children. I want to change public policies. I want to live more simply. But not yet.

Paul identifies two laws that reside within each person: the law of God and the law of sin. Quick pleasures entice me. God’s law radiates a more penetrating beauty. Here I am known and loved. Here lies healing. This joy is not fleeting. The psalmist asks: God, teach me your statutes. But God does not impose more rules. Deeper than judgment runs compassion. Touched by mercy, we respond with grace and openness to the wounds of the world.

During his visit to a prison in Philadelphia, Pope Francis spoke of Jesus washing his companions’ feet so they could come to the table. All of us are invited to the table. “All of us have something we need to be cleansed of or purified from. All of us.” The story does not end with punishment or defeat.

There is the promise that with rehabilitation a person can rejoin society. Who knows? That person from jail might sit beside me at the table. Francis admonishes us not to slam doors and throw away the key since “Jesus came to save us from the lie that says that no one can change.”

Aren’t the signs of the time fairly clear? Solidarity with those on the margins is essential. Dialogue not combat is needed. There is much to be done in this world. In the gospel, Jesus shoves us out of our comfy seats. These tasks don’t await future generations. I am called. It is I.

Jeanne Schuler-Creighton University's Philosophy Department