

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Jan 28th 2016

Memorial of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Priest and Doctor of the Church

A lamp for my feet is your word, a light for my path. Ps 119:105 (Alleluia verse for today)

So much about the biblical vision is about the relationship between what God does and how we respond. Think about this for a second: When we ask what it means to take our faith seriously, isn't it true that we usually mean, "Where should I be trying harder?" On the one hand, that's not a bad question to ask; after all, we are often lazy or distracted and sense that we may be spending our energies on the wrong things, and wonder what we should be doing. But on the other hand, "Where should I be trying harder?" puts the emphasis in the wrong place, as if living my faith seriously is, first, all about me. No! My faith is first all about God. As St. John says in the magnificent first letter of his, "God has first loved us." Acknowledging that reality in faith leads to responding by being grateful to God and then loving others, even our enemies.

Consider the quote printed above. Reference to feet and walking in psalms is usually a way of talking about any deliberate human behavior, what it means to live in a way that is really "going somewhere," using my body in a way that has some direction, some sense of purpose. So that little verse from Psalm 119 expresses a succinct summary of the life of faith; a person who prays that verse is saying, "My whole life is a response to your initiative in revealing yourself in love for me." And as Christians, we understand that God the Father's word now includes his self-revelation in the person of Jesus. As Pope Francis has proclaimed recently, Jesus is the face of God's compassion. Our Christian life is a matter of discovering over and over again that God has loved us first, and responding accordingly.

The experience of King David in the today's first reading, and in the psalm that reflects on that experience, illustrates this reality vividly. David was nursing his bold plan of building a proper house (temple) for God, but God, through the prophet Nathan, answers that, no, in fact, he (God) is going to build David a "house," but not a temple. What God will build is a "house" in the sense of a dynasty, beginning with his son Solomon--and, as it turns out, climaxing in Jesus of Nazareth, who will shepherd the people (including us gentiles!) in a whole new way of "walking"—"walking in the Spirit," as St. Paul will teach us to say.

This is the point of Jesus' saying in today's Gospel, "Take care what you hear (or listen to)." For what we listen to leads to how we will "walk." So living out that little verse from Ps 119 entails responding to God's initiative—in the story of Israel, and the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and in our own experience, especially as interpreted by the authoritative teachers in the community of faith today, not least Pope Francis. Oh, and how does this relate to the Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas? He was the great teacher who best developed the insight that God is the ultimate initiator of everything that is.

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