

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Feb 16th 2016

This past fall, our new Creighton President, Fr. Daniel Hendrickson, chose a poem by the Jesuit poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, to illuminate his role as servant president. In the poem “As Kingfishers Catch Fire” the poet asserts:

I say móre: the just man justices;

Keeps grace: thát keeps all his goings graces.

In another sonnet by Hopkins that I dearly love, the poet begins by saying:

Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend

With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is just.

In both powerful poems the Victorian poet connects “justice” with being one with Christ; that is, by being truly human and filled with God’s Spirit one proclaims God’s justice that is woven with mercy. But it is the power of God, the Divine creative word breathing forth His Spirit over the created order that capacitates each one of us to be and to become what we are called to be – Christ.

Today’s first reading from Isaiah is a prophetic promise by God that when his word goes forth, like rain or snow upon the earth, it does not come back empty, but transforms all that it touches, and ‘brings forth fruit.’ Hopkins’ closing lines beg God to make good on that promise by reminding God that other creatures accomplish what they are for, but he (and we!) need the rain of God’s Spirit to make it possible for us to be fruitful.

Matthew’s account of the Lord’s Prayer in today’s Gospel witnesses Jesus teaching his followers how to ask for that moisture from the Father upon the droughts of our inner lives. Again that central message that we are created to be with and for God. When our prayer begs that God’s will be accomplished on earth, we become our true selves. To be spared from evil is to be spared from any real separation of God’s mercy. And the effects of mercy for me, are poured out when I am merciful to others.

This first week of Lent I find myself looking deep into my memories to discover those places that have dried up because I have not forgiven someone. It is there that the rain or snow of God’s presence will break open the clotted soil of my heart and allow the seeds of compassion to flourish. Remind me, Lord, of anyone I have failed to respond mercifully toward. “Mine, O thou Lord of life, send my roots rain.”

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