

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Feb 23rd 2016

The reading from Isaiah is both an offer of reconciliation and a threat of chastisement for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. The chapter from Isaiah contains more than what we encounter in today's first reading. Sandwiched between the first verse and the remainder of the reading there was a criticism of the leaders not so different from that found in the Gospel. Symbolic actions without a change of heart do not bring us closer to God.

The Psalm continues this theme. It condemns religious hypocrisy. If the missing verses from this psalm are included there is again an offer of reconciliation (and a threat). Going through the motions does not bring salvation without the change of heart.

The Gospel is a direct criticism of the religious hypocrisy of the Pharisees. It reminds of the things that are done for public display. The Gospel concludes presenting the model of the servant leader.

In each reading it is made clear that the thing, which ultimately matters, is what is in the heart. We need to first bring order to our inner most being and then let our actions flow from what we find there. This is the theme of the Year of Mercy. This is the theme of Lent. My focus should not be on that which I am giving up. Instead I need to be identifying what brings me closer to God and the self that I am called to be. In the same vein this is a time to examine those impediments to these relationships.

We are in the midst of packing up for a major move. This means going through the twenty years of stuff that we have accumulated in our current home. It is revealing where we chosen to invest our time and our money. In retrospect I feel much better about some choices than others. The process of assessing what we will take with us as we move forward is just as revealing. Things go into the boxes that we will take, the pile of things that someone else could use and the bin for the trash. I have been amazed at how much junk we have collected. It has been interesting which things retain an emotional attachment to a different time and place as well as where we classify these things in terms of our future lives. The children's Legos and their first Halloween costumes, my father's watch, old birthday and anniversary cards, all have memories attached. Recalling the Gospel we also become aware of the things that were there for show. Our sorting choices tell us something about where we think that we are going.

This leads me to a prayer today that asks forgiveness for misplaced values.

Dear Lord,

You have given me so many gifts.

Some I have used more wisely than others.

Sometimes I am drawn into consumerism.

Forgive me for my misdirected choices.

Help me to use this season of Lent as a time for remaking my heart for the future.

Guide me in my future path.

Help me to identify that which will lead me to be the person that I am called be.

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