

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Mar 3rd 2016

Jeremiah preaches in the Temple (around 609 BCE) and admonishes his listeners about their hypocrisy—their way of life contradicts their pious rituals and sacrifices, which are therefore meaningless in the eyes of the Lord. Their sacrifices are tainted by disobedience to the covenant relationship and the blood of the innocent. God neither desires nor requests their sacrifice (Ps. 40); rather he asks for their justice and kindness (Micah 6:8). Protecting and caring for the anawim—the last, the lost, and the least — is more pleasing to the Lord than all their burnt offerings. Although God sent his prophets to guide people, to help them discern, and to be obedient to God, yet they “did not listen.”

Like Jeremiah, Jesus too encounters stiff-necked people who accuse him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul when he exorcises a man who could not speak. Jesus counters their arguments:

The exorcisms are against Satan’s power. It would be mutiny if Jesus was Satan’s friend.

If Jesus worked under the power of Satan, why not say the same of other exorcists? And if they believed that God’s power worked through other exorcists, they ought to say the same of Jesus if they did not wish to condemn their own.

Jesus’ exorcisms show that Satan’s power has been broken and God’s reign has come. Jesus’ opponents—if they understood that the Egyptians saw the “finger of God” in Moses’ signs — would realize that in Jesus the Kingdom of God has dawned.

Lastly, the simile of the strong man explains that God has defeated Satan and taken away his armor.

Jesus’ words are strong; there is no room for neutrality. We have to examine our commitment to Christ and choose — to gather with him. Or to scatter.

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