

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, May 19th 2016

These readings leave me uncomfortable. The reading from James and the Psalm are reminders of just how short life is and consideration of what we do with what we have. The Gospel continues with strong images driving home personal responsibility.

I went in semi-retirement on May 13th. I was fortunate to hear the good that people had to say about me. The university has promoted me to emeritus faculty. Still I am left with concerns on several levels. Twenty-seven years in the classroom has caused me to give particular attention to verse 42 of the Gospel (Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.). I know the kind of person that I am. I fear a God who dispenses justice with good reason. Work was a place where I tended not to show my weaknesses. I was the person who was not afraid to say what many were thinking but did not want to be the one to say it. Everyday I went to bed not with my own personal affirmations but instead focusing on my shortcomings. If I were to take today's Gospel literally, I would look like the most unfortunate of war veterans.

I find myself not afraid of death, but rather afraid of using my last days in the wrong way. I still have enough grant related research work to keep me busy 100% of the time and enough grant related funds to support me to 20% of my previous salary. I question if this is how I should be spending my later years. I realize what I will miss most are the classrooms full of students. Fortunately I will still have research students. Today's first reading places me firmly in the realm of those whose possessions are on the road to decay. My life has been very comfortable. I am packing up today. The movers are loading the truck. (My wife, who is 5 years my junior, started in March as a college dean on the East Coast. This is a job that she deserves and for which she is well-suited.) I am going to join her now that the semester is over. My life could become even more comfortable, but is that what I want?

I seem to be in the place along with some of my graduating students. When I first came to Creighton, I like many of them knew immediately that this was the right place for me. Now it is time to move on. Some students have a clear direction, a waiting job or perhaps graduate school or medical school. Some have the fire in their heart about what comes next, while others do not. For only the second time in my life, I belong to the latter group. This is Pentecost week. There probably is no better time for regaining that fire.

My prayer today is a traditional prayer for openness to the guidance of the Spirit.

(I remember this prayer from the first time that I belonged to that latter group.)

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.

And kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

And you will renew the face of the earth.

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