

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Jul 11th 2016

Memorial of Saint Benedict, Abbot

In today's first reading, God is annoyed – really annoyed. The Lord, through Isaiah, is telling the people of that day (and us now) that He's not interested in external show that doesn't represent internal changes of heart and conversion that result in concern for others.

It's as if God is saying, "Don't give me your empty words, your ritualistic religious practices. I'm talking reality here – helping those who have been wronged and orphans and widows."

Of course there's nothing wrong with religious practices, but if we do them without thinking, or, even worse, as a cover for behavior and thoughts that run counter to the Spirit of God, they are meaningless. In fact, God is not happy at all about that.

The Responsorial Psalm echoes the same sentiment: "Why do you recite my statutes, and profess my covenant with your mouth, though you hate discipline and cast my words behind you?"

Why indeed? Why do we do that? We like to fool ourselves and appear holy or "perfect," but God can never be fooled. The Spirit knows our hearts and knows why we go to church or Mass or Bible study, and knows that the reasons we ignore our co-worker or neighbor, or don't go out of our way to "redress the wronged," are petty and selfish and short-sighted.

Our only hope is to throw ourselves upon God's mercy as we remember that what He really wants from us is to "make justice" our aim.

Let us pray: Lord, the next time Your Spirit prompts me to help someone in need or listen to a friend or place another's needs before my own, help me to remember the high priority you place on service and justice. Help them to become my priorities too, so that I may do Your will as much as is humanly possible.

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