

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Jul 14th 2016

Memorial of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, Virgin

My reflection today is focused primarily on the Gospel message. I think the labor Jesus refers to here is the labor of the spirit in the Kingdom of God, not our physical labors in this world. The reason I think that is because I think the Old Testament readings for today are also about our spiritual struggles. We can certainly relate to the acknowledgement that our souls yearn for the Lord, but that we are so often prisoners of death instead of life. That is exhausting. Despite our faith, for most of us, our spirits are in a constant vigil to make peace with the Lord for our sins. It isn't about things we've done wrong. It is about what we can't seem to do well. We anguish over our yearnings to do what is right, to do justice, and yet, without the Lord, we don't accomplish much. In our destitute states we pray for mercy. And it is mercy, I think, that Jesus offers to us in the Gospel of Matthew today.

I have been thinking and praying about mercy ever since Pope Francis asked us to do so. This Gospel message speaks much about the mercy of the Lord to me. In my reflections, I have come to think that mercy is an offering of peace with God. It is God's way of helping us achieve the desire of our souls to seek the Lord. Mercy is not quite the same as forgiveness. I think it is more about assistance to keep on with our spiritual vigils. For these reasons, the words in Matthew are probably my favorite words of Jesus. These words provide encouragement to learn how to make peace with God. In this message, Jesus offers us a release from our burdens, but not a final release to those doomed to die. It is not just a release from the judgment of our sins in death, it is about a release to live life. Jesus offers an invitation to take up the yoke of Christ to enjoy life fully in justice, peace, and praise, without an overwhelming sense of burden.

I think that this is the good news that we are to proclaim. It is not just that Jesus died for our sins and redeemed our souls so we can go to heaven when we die. That is still too much focused on sin and a lot of people don't really feel that burdened by their sins. Our job is not to convince them that they will suffer judgment for them. We are called to proclaim the good news that Jesus saves our souls from our anxieties and insecurities about who we are and whose we are so we are free to live our lives more abundantly. The good news gives us confidence to look to the Lord for a joyful existence, a sense of salvation we can't really accomplish by ourselves through trying to live without sin by constraining our spirits. Jesus assures us that following him doesn't have to be a burden that represses our spirits. Jesus offers us mercy in the readings today. I pray today that my reflections will draw us all closer to the mercy of God, and help lift the spirits of any who feel burdened by all sorts of spiritual anguish over sin or death. Even more so, I pray that those of us who do find rest in taking up an easy yoke and light burden will be able to share that joy with others.

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