

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Sep 10th 2016

What an abundance of rich sources for reflection in today's two readings! Paul warns us of the danger of being idolatrous. There are so many real and potential idols in our world today. We just finished the Olympics, and it seems that the announcers and stories about the athletes create an aura of idolatry for them and their accomplishments. There are "reality" talent contests galore, and movie stars, musicians, politicians (wait, I said idols, not idles!) and others that call attention to themselves or are extolled by adoring media. We know from experience, though, that popular idols are people, and they make mistakes – sometimes, as with the Russian athletes banned from participation or the four U.S. male swimmers, before they even ripen into idols! But what, or who, are idols for us? Doesn't the popular culture make it easy for us to idolize? Yet, inevitably, the result is the same – we lose faith in the idols.

Jesus tells us that the tree bears the fruit by which it is known – seems obvious we won't harvest apples from a walnut tree. But if we are the tree, what is our fruit? Good from good, and evil from evil, says Jesus. The little nugget for me is the language that says "out of the store of goodness in his heart" the good person brings forth good. That store of goodness implies an inventory, a supply, a savings bank, and thus it can expand, or shrink, depending on whether the person builds it up or draws it down, that is, does good, or evil. So the store is not fixed and indeterminate, but something we can control. We can change the harvest from our tree by how we live our lives.

Then there are the foundation thoughts. The recent earthquake in Italy destroyed villages that were many hundreds of years old, stone buildings built on stone foundations. Yet they tumbled and crumbled. The floods in Louisiana swept away homes and cars and all in its path. Those homes and buildings also had foundations, but not of stone, and so they too collapsed in the face of the torrents of water. Jesus tells us that some foundations are better than others, and yet in both these recent tragedies the lives built upon them were destroyed when the earth shook and the rains came. Can foundations be made stronger? And if yes, how?

So I think these several passages can be synthesized. It seems to me that building one's life on a relationship with God, and following the calling that God sends, is the key. Why bother with transitory human idols when God is constant, and always loving, and never failing? Why not positively build up a tree of goodwill in gratitude to God for the gifts we have received, instead of negatively shrinking our hearts so we do evil? Why not strengthen our foundation against the storms and tremors that will come our way by following God's call as demonstrated and taught by Jesus?

No foundation may be strong enough to protect our houses against all possible storms, but building up the foundation of our spiritual lives will protect us against the storms of temptation and evil in our world. If we reject false idols and remain true to God, if build up a store of goodwill in our hearts, if listen to the words we receive from God and act on them, then our spiritual foundation will also strengthen. The people in Italy will rebuild by placing one brick upon their foundations, but it will take time to have a building. The people in Louisiana will rebuild by attaching one board to another, but it will take time to have a house. And we can strengthen our foundation by doing one good act at a time, but it will take time to become as strong as we are called to be.

And so my prayer today is for the grace to take the little steps needed to make great strides in

strengthening my foundation and relationship with God.

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