

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Sep 16th 2017

Since I have been writing these reflections for quite some time, it happens every once in a while that I am assigned a reading for which I have already written a reflection. That is the case today with the Gospel selection. In the passage that follows I revisit my reflection from September 10, 2016 and adapt it for my current thoughts and events and for the first reading from Paul.

Paul reminds us that Jesus came to the world to save sinners. Paul also suggests that Jesus is patient, waiting for those who are weak to come around and begin to believe in His salvific power.

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. In Luke 13:6 Jesus tells a related parable about non-productive fruit trees. In that passage the owner of the orchard is convinced by the manager not to remove a tree but to give it some tender loving care and allow it to rejuvenate. 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. And bringing in the thoughts from Luke reinforces the obvious in tending fruit trees – in some years they are more productive than others and better care produces more fruit.

Then there are the foundation thoughts. The recent hurricane in Houston and the gulf area has caused untold damage and loss of life. The floods and winds of historic proportions swept away homes and cars and all in its path. Those homes and buildings also had foundations, and yet they collapsed in the face of the torrents of water and hundred-mile per hour winds. Jesus tells us that some foundations are better than others, and yet in Houston and other locations in the gulf lives and buildings were destroyed when the wind blew and the rains came. Can foundations be made stronger? And if yes, how?

It seems to me that growing a tree of goodness and building one's life on the foundation of a relationship with God is the key. 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 prune away the non-productive parts of our lives so we can bear more fruit on the strong branches that remain? 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 untended tree will always bear good fruit. No foundation may be strong enough to protect our houses against all possible storms. But pruning away weak branches will make trees stronger, and building up the foundation of our spiritual lives will protect us against the storms of temptation and evil in our world. Here in the U.S., the people in Houston and other parts of Texas and Louisiana will rebuild by shoring up their foundations, but it will take time for their towns and neighborhoods to be what they were before the storms. We can strengthen our spiritual foundation by doing one good act at a time, by pruning away the non-productive branches of our lives, but it will take time for us to become as strong as we are called to be, and to bear the fruit that God has envisioned for us since the day of our creation. In the meantime it is comforting to know that Jesus came to the world precisely to forgive our shortcomings, and that He is patient in allowing us to return to Him.

And so my prayer today is to be a good steward of the fruit tree that is my life, and for the grace to prune out the branches of my life that do not yield the fruit that God has called me to bring forth.

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