

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Oct 3rd 2017

Alexander Pope once said "Be not the first by whom the new are tried, Nor yet the last to lay the old aside" (An Essay on Criticism, 1711), which seems to indicate the desirability of steering a middle course between extremes. That is certainly not always true: Christ calls for a complete adherence to Him, the most complete faith and radical hope possible, and anything middle-of-the-road, merely polite, or half-hearted would be unacceptable (Revelation 3:16).

James and John here do advocate a rather extreme course of action which Christ reprimands them for.

So just what is it which Christ would prefer from us instead of their blood-and-thunder approach? That would be hard to spell out both accurately and in each case in our lives today. I suspect that He would wish us to pray hard for those we disagree with and to live charitably with those whom we think we can justifiably condemn; I am certain that He would ask us to treat others gently, as brothers and sisters, and to do what we can to change them by love --- which can even lead to us being changed ourselves and to our growing in the process.

That calls for profound humility and patience, for letting ourselves truly become instruments of God's peace in our families and communities, and for leaving the outcome squarely in God's hands.

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