

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Dec 13th 2017

Memorial of Saint Lucy, Virgin and Martyr

Today's scripture set off songs in my head as I read it. Most of these songs quote the readings: "We Will Rise Again" by Haas; "Bless the Lord, My Soul," by Berthier; "Come to the Water" by Foley, SJ; "Come to Me" by Joncas; "Come to Me, O Weary Traveler" by J. Michael Thompson; "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say" to the tune FINGLASWEST by Joncas. One piece only has one line of text in common, but it always pops into my head with the Isaiah reading we have today: "Have Ye Not Known?" from Randall Thompson's *A Peaceable Kingdom*. It actually quotes Isaiah 40:21, just before the first reading today. My undergraduate choir sang the entire work for one of our concerts. Here are links to the two final movements I'll reflect on today:

"Have Ye Not Known?"

"Ye Shall Have a Song"

In Thompson's choral work, these words from the King James translation are striking and insistent. "Have ye not known? Have ye not heard? Hath it not been told you from the beginning? Have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth?" Rather than continuing with Isaiah's meditation on God as Creator and ruler over the heavens and earth, Thompson follows these urgent words with text from ten chapters earlier, Isaiah 30:29. "Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept, and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord." These words close the entire choral work.

The way that last movement of the work responds to the insistence of "Have ye not heard?" evokes the comfort and accompaniment that Jesus speaks of in the Gospel today. What is this message we should have heard of already? It starts softly and gently, "Ye shall have a song!" and gradually builds through many repetitions of "and gladness of heart." It grows in the same way a smile spreads across a person's face as Jesus' message of peace sinks in. The melody dances along the words "as when one goeth with the pipe" as one's feet would dance to a flute, if we still visited loved ones by foot and played music along the way. If the dancer is carrying anything, her burden must certainly be light. It regains gravity at the words "to come into the mountain of the Lord" and the volume swells as if to fill the whole mountain. In recognizing God as Creator and our ultimate caretaker, we realize "we shall have a song!"

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