

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Jan 17th 2018

Memorial of Saint Anthony, Abbot

Blessed be the Lord, my Rock! (Psalm 144)

Today's first reading is a familiar one. Young David, against Saul's advice and armed only with his staff, five stones and a slingshot, confronts Goliath, a giant of a man and a hardened warrior. With a single shot, he incapacitates Goliath and slays him with his own sword. This bible story has had great popularity through the centuries and has deeply shaped our imagination and belief in a God who takes sides in battles, leading the underdog to victory against the enemy when there is seemingly little chance of success. We can no longer afford to have such polarized thinking about conflict, whether they are internal struggles, discord in relationships or war between nations. What else might this story have to offer us?

In today's Gospel, there is another conflict brewing between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus, moved by the suffering of the man with a withered hand, heals him despite the objection of the Pharisees since it is the Sabbath. Though angered and grieved at their hardness of heart, Jesus is not swayed by their rigid interpretation of the law. How is it that we cling so tightly to rigid rules when clearly Jesus demonstrates that the law is to serve life, and not the other way around?

Both David and Jesus find the Lord, their Rock, in the midst of the challenges of their daily lives. Both listened to the voice of the One who is the Rock, in contrast to the voices around them. David's listening to God's voice and guidance, despite Saul's protest, and despite the Philistine's size and strength, is the triumph and real victory here. Jesus acts on God's desire to heal despite the Pharisee's protests and hostility. These are powerful stories of courage in the face of opposition, encouraging us to listen to the voice of God and act on it, even when we stand alone.

The voice of God, our Rock, softens our hearts, opens our ears and eyes and minds so we can see and hear and think clearly. Each time we act on that voice we fan in to flame the fire for life...the desire to live lives of hope and trust, compassion and peace. It starts as a small thing... like a little pebble... but has huge strength in the face of rigid and polarized thinking - masterful warriors that we contend with every day.

Who or what helps me hear the voice of God in the midst of conflict? What diminishes my ability to hear and see clearly?

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