

## Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Sep 3rd 2018

Memorial of Saint Gregory the Great, Pope and Doctor of the Church

At times when the readings I have been assigned are not that clear to me, or I feel that I need a deeper understanding of context, etc., I search for commentaries from others that will help me. Today's gospel reading was one of those passages that I wanted to understand better.

I think what troubled me in the excerpt from Luke was the situation – Jesus comes home, and all seems to be going well with His old friends and neighbors and relatives. Then He challenges the listeners in an unanticipated way, and they react “filled with fury.” Why – what did Jesus say that was so maddening to these people of faith attending synagogue that day?

Jesus carefully selected Isaiah 61 as the passage He shared with His listeners. Isaiah brings good news to his people – a jubilee year, a time of forgiveness and freedom and sharing and rejuvenation. This reading from Isaiah would have been well-known to those in the synagogue, and so they felt uplifted and heartened to contemplate that this good time would be happening to them. But Jesus kept teaching, and as He did, the people became angry.

Jesus pivoted from the Isaiah jubilee year for Israel to proclaiming the good news for a wider audience. By reminding His listeners that Elijah and Elisha went outside Israel to bring relief and solace, Jesus told them that the message He brought was for all of us, not just Israel. And by framing His message more broadly, Jesus irritated those in the crowd who felt God told them to not only extend the jubilee charitable acts with their own people, but also to those who were not of Israel.

Jesus challenges His listeners then, and now, to look beyond their (and our) own pre-conceived ideas about salvation and charity and to see with open eyes and hearts and minds our fellow pilgrims in this life. We live in troubled times with much stress (but that is no different than all of our ancestors in all of our lands – there have always been plenty of troubled times to go around). We are bombarded with admonitions to take care of ourselves first, to ignore the other, to exclude rather welcome, and to push away rather than draw in. Many of our political and other leaders around the world stress security and enforcement over charity and compassion. We are tempted to clench our fists instead of open our arms.

What would Jesus say and do? Are we strong enough to answer that question truthfully and to follow His example? Can we resist the cacophony of culture to be focused on ourselves instead of reaching out to others? Can we follow the examples of Elijah and Elisha and bring solace to those outside our own circles and countries? Can we see ourselves as part of a community that is more than our family and clan and tribe? Can we forgive the debts of others and share our surplus with those in need regardless of who they are and where they live?

And so my prayer today is for the gift of simple sight – the sight of a trusting child, that is not clouded by prejudices and uncertainties and biases, but pure in seeing the divine spark that resides in each of us as a gift from our Creator.

