

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Oct 5th 2018

We must admit that we are all in alignment with Job's lament at several times in our lives. Job's despair mirrors the human condition. We often don't accomplish anything no matter how hard we work. But even worse, it seems to us at times that even God has set us up for failure and frustration. Bitterness of the spirit overcomes us when we feel our life's work brings us nothing but weariness. Like Job, we curse the day we were born or the one before us.

Job wasn't the only one who often sank into despair. The author of Psalm 88 felt overwhelmed by wretchedness also. Again, this passage speaks to the human condition. The dark nights of the soul come to all of us when we let our troubles get the better of us. At those times, we often feel that God does not hear us, nor does God sustain us with strength and courage. We feel abandoned by God or worse yet, condemned by God and a victim of God's wrath.

As much as God loves us, God doesn't respond to all this despair and these supplications in the way we would like. God doesn't lighten our load or give us a big reward, no matter how hard we try to impress upon God our good intentions. Instead, God sends Jesus to admonish us for our human tendencies to place our strivings to accomplish much in the light of our own needs for greatness. Let's be honest, most of us do think at some time or another during the day, "who is the greatest?" in some context or another, but probably not in the context of the Kingdom of heaven. We are most likely thinking about the kingdom of this earth. Jesus knows this.

So, in Matthew, Jesus tells us that what we should strive for is to demonstrate more humility in the ways we live our lives and what we strive to do. Our sufferings, even if they are for good purposes, do not give us any privileges in the Kingdom of heaven. Instead of seeking strength to achieve our goals for greatness, we need to ask for the strength to suffer with Christ. Jesus tells us here that we need to go back to our humble beginnings as a child and get a fresh perspective on our lives. We need repentance, we are told, not deliverance, when we get frustrated.

That is very difficult to do for most of us, including me. I think that the Jesuits have it right when they go off on silent retreats for a whole week a couple of times a year. They say they listen to God when they do this. I really admire the fact that they humble themselves to figuratively and literally "shut up and listen!" I think it must work somewhat like when parents send little kids who have tantrums to sit in a corner and think about it for a while. They usually come out with a fresh perspective. I know it works well for the Jesuits. I am reflecting on the lessons today that I should seriously try this, even though my lifestyle does not give me the time to take an entire week off to silently listen to God. I am told, however, that it can help to take even an hour a day to quietly reflect on humility. It will be a challenge enough for most of us, and that certainly includes me, to start with ten minutes!

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