

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Dec 14th 2018

Memorial of Saint John of the Cross, Priest and Doctor of the Church

Merry Christmas to you all during this wonderful time of year. I love the Christmas season because it offers a chance to spend more time with family and friends and be connected with one another in ways that our busy day-to-day lives do not seem to offer.

As I read Matthew's gospel reading for today, I couldn't help to think how perfect it is for this time of year. I interpret the reading as Jesus commenting on the behaviors of the people and pointing out two observations – people are often too critical of others, and they never seem to be satisfied. He compared them to children (but we as adults can be just as bad) that complain because they do not get what they want, “We played the flute, but you didn't dance” and “we sang a dirge but you didn't mourn.” That is to say (from the children's perspective), “why won't you do what I want you to do.” These words have familiar tones with society today. We seem to have little compromise most of the time. We have our opinions regardless of the circumstance, and are often angry and critical when the outcomes do not match our wishes. It's easy to see this in childish behavior, which is probably why Jesus compares them to children. But, adults can show the same behavior, just in different context. Jesus gives another example of how we are often critical of others, just for the sake of being critical. John did not eat – so something must have been wrong with him. Jesus did eat – and something was wrong with him, too. It's a “no win” situation. How often do we do this in our daily lives?

I think one of the reasons that I like this reading is because Jesus, once again, takes on a bit of a parental role for us. I picture him in this scene talking with the people much the same as parents talk with their children when they are behaving badly. He points out the bad behavior in hopes that they will be able to see it, too. Another reason I like this reading is that it makes me feel a bit closer to Jesus and everyone who lived 2000 years ago. The behavior he describes is still very prevalent in today's world. It is easy to think that 2000 years ago was too long ago to relate to the people of that time. But, people are people – then and now. Our behaviors, thoughts, actions, fears, hopes, and dreams are likely all very similar. This makes the gospel readings all that more relevant as we place ourselves in the scenes that the gospel writers present for us.

So, as I reflect on what this reading means to me during the Advent season, I think mostly about perspective. Regardless of how the busyness of this time of year can make us feel, this is a time of great joy – not criticism, and of great peace – not dissatisfaction. We have a choice on how we would like to experience this time of year. I wish you all a joyful and peaceful season. Merry Christmas.

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