

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Oct 12th 2013

“Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.” Luke

As a kid growing up in the pre-Vatican II Church, I used to feel sorry for non-Catholics because we had the truth and they didn't. That's why we could only enter Protestant churches for weddings and funerals – not that I knew any Protestants let alone Jews, Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists.

Then Pope John XXIII almost miraculously opened us to a view of salvation more like what Jesus says in today's Gospel, “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.” While I still hear the word of God through the voice of my church, I no longer have the narrowly pinched view of what God's voice sounds like that I did as a child.

Instead I resonate to the way Pope John taught us to reach out to our separated brothers and sisters and reminded us that “spiritually we are Semites.” I love the fact that my Jesuit campus embraces people of all faith traditions and even provides a prayer room on campus for our Muslim students. It is moving to serve on a committee promoting our Ignatian vision and mission where one of the strongest members is a devout Hindu.

In contrast, the first reading from Joel seems to proclaim that God loves only one group of people. “But Judah shall abide forever, and Jerusalem for all generations. I will avenge their blood, and not leave it unpunished. The LORD dwells in Zion.” Not being a Scripture scholar, I don't know the context of the passage or its deeper meaning. But Joel is far from the only spiritual writer to lay some kind of an exclusive claim to God that God might not recognize.

If today's passage from Luke sounds a little like today's headlines, it has something to do with Pope Francis' loving reach out to all of humanity. Echoing the sentiments that all who “hear the word of God and observe it are blessed,” the Pope recently reminded us that “We must meet one another doing good. ‘But I don't believe Father. I am an atheist.’ But do good: We will meet one another there.”

Perhaps even those currently denied the gift of faith still hear God's word in some form and are blessed because they observe it.

God bless you Pope Francis! Up in heaven, Pope John is smiling.

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