

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Jan 9th 2014

Today's first reading speaks of a familiar topic for Christians – love for God and love for our human brothers and sisters. The passage in 1 John helps put substance into the meaning of love – “For the love of God is this, that we keep his commandments.” We do not always keep those commandments, despite the assessment that those commandments are not burdensome.

When we think about the commandments, they resonate as true and good, at least in the abstract. But they still present challenges for us in particular cases. If failing to love a brother reflects a failure to love God, then we do indeed fail often. But of course, it is because we have seen our brother or sister than makes it difficult for us! Perhaps it is because we do not see the right things about them, or more particularly, we cannot see beyond those things that get in our way.

Alas, I am a selective seer who often focuses on those things that I want to see. I recognize that my filters need to be adjusted and recalibrated often, though not always in time to spare me from error.

This recalibration requires a touch from God. “Beloved, we love God because he first loved us.”

This divine pattern of initiation gives us hope; let us not forget this as we encounter our own failings. They should bring us back to that first love and our need for God. Encountering God's love and mercy bring us back to our senses, helping us see more clearly. We have the sacraments as a tangible means for assistance in this regard.

The gospel for today includes the prophetic passage from Isaiah that we also heard during Advent – but this time it is coming from the mouth of our Lord. Those words sound melodious to the ears -- I would have joined those who heard Jesus in being amazed at these poetic and gracious words. But many of these same folks wanted to kill Jesus when he started to do the things foretold by the prophet. Once again we are seeing a human capacity to embrace an abstraction, perhaps because we are able to reconstruct it to fit into our own categories and priorities. Recalibration is in order.

Let us pray to the Lord for true vision, for just judgments, and most of all, to see the depth of his love for us so that we can reflect his gift of life more completely in all our seeing, hearing, and doing.

Thanks be to God.

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