

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Feb 18th 2014

“Blessed are they who persevere in temptation, for when they have been proved, will receive the crown of life.” Most of us want that crown of life, but do we want to persevere when we are being tempted by our darker side? Some of our temptations may be considered normal. For example, my desire to “have it all together” may be a desire that many of us have, yet it leads to darkness. I am not in fact perfect, and most of us humans realize that we are not perfect, at least this side of heaven. So we need to be intentional about rejecting the leaven of the Pharisees, who prided themselves on their purity and their knowledge of the law. There are many traps for me in this, as I want to practice my life of faith and be known as someone who follows Jesus. This can lead to a kind of perfectionism or thoughts of “I’m better than THAT person.” Obviously these kinds of thoughts do not come from the good Spirit, but rather from a place of feeling inadequate or fearful. Jesus invites me to be human, and acknowledge my fear and my inadequacy without comparing myself to another person.

We are invited daily to remember what God has done for us in Christ Jesus – through the gift of Jesus taking flesh and dying, we have been saved. It’s GREAT NEWS, and we are called to share this News in our lives with all the people we meet. As Christians, we are invited to take the words of the Gospel to heart and reflect on it; am I a gloomy Christian with a hardened heart, with limited sight of myself and my brothers and sisters? Do I have ears that not only hear the cry of the poor and of those in need but that truly listen to what God is saying through each person and each encounter? God must be mercy, as Martin Luther said, and if our hearts are open to all brothers and sisters, then we need to respond to the call to look fully, joyfully, and gratefully at all our brothers and sisters, see their goodness and gifts, and rejoice in who they are and how they may lead us to God. We are called to respond with love and respect for all, even though I seem most challenged to do this in my own home on some days.

I am grateful that Jesus calls us both individually and as members of a faith community. It is in my faith communities that I have learned of and experienced love, mercy, forgiveness, hope, understanding, and shared wisdom with others. It is our community that can help us both recognize and transform our temptations, in the grace and hope of the Holy Spirit that guides us. Today let us choose the leaven of hope, the leaven of faith, and the leaven of love as Jesus showed the first disciples. Then we will share and feast on much better bread with each other in our worship, our witness, our service, and our communities.

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