

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Jul 30th 2014

I like puzzles: word puzzles like Jumble and crosswords (if they are not too hard), jigsaw puzzles, the number patterns of Sudoku (but only up to “medium” difficulty) and mystery/suspense fiction and dramas, which sometimes have elements of puzzle. Today’s Scriptures puzzled me. When in the first reading Jeremiah begins, “Woe to me, mother, that you gave me birth,” and when he says that God has filled him “with indignation “ and is for him “a treacherous brook,” I don’t identify with such unhappiness. When the Psalm prays, “Rescue me from evildoers; from bloodthirsty men save me,” I don’t want to see a connection with my admittedly sheltered life. But of course we’re all vulnerable; evil happens, and loss, illness and suffering afflict all of us. Anyone with faith may sing the Psalm refrain, “God is my refuge on the day of distress,” for we all know that days of distress do come. So the Lord answers Jeremiah’s complaint: “For I am with you, to deliver and rescue you, says the Lord.”

“I am with you.” The promise that the Kingdom of Heaven is already here, in this distress-full world, is the final solution to the three puzzles I found in today’s rather short Gospel excerpt. First, as I notice the phrase “Kingdom of Heaven” as never before, I’m wondering about the word “Kingdom.”

Although as fascinated as any American by the British royal family, I have too many negative images of kings and kingdoms from historical events to have a clearly positive view of “kingdom.” Of course “kingdom” in biological classification is a really big category, and “kingdom” connotes a totality, or at least something immense. A modern theologian explained “kingdom of God” as a process in time, how God manifests being God in our world. And besides “Thy Kingdom come” in the Lord’s Prayer, we have the summing-up line: “The Kingdom, the Power and the Glory are Yours.” Somehow “Kingdom” does make sense, as I ponder it; I certainly can suggest no better word in English for God’s power, glory, authority, presence and especially care in our lives. Yes, my solution is: “Thy Kingdom come!”

Second, I was puzzled by the image of the Kingdom as a “treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again.” Is it honest to buy the land without telling the landowner of the treasure? But my solution is to think that the previous owner has seen but has not recognized the treasure. So the Kingdom is extremely valuable, worth all that one can give for it – but perhaps not easy to recognize. This does make sense! “Thy Kingdom come.”

The third puzzle is the “merchant searching for pearls” who gives all he has to buy the “pearl of great price.” I am puzzled that my Gospel translation says that “the Kingdom of heaven is like a merchant...” I would expect the image to parallel the treasure in the field, so that it should be expressed as “The kingdom... is like a pearl that a merchant has been looking for.” Why is the image reversed? Am I just the fussy grammarian? But my solution is to leap to thinking about the simile exactly as I read it, and to say that the Kingdom is looking for the Pearl – that is, God’s power, glory, authority, presence and care (love) is here for us! I am overwhelmed with wonder at this revelation of God’s tremendous, unreasonable love for his creation. And I think again of the promise from the first

reading, "I am with you," and the well-known words "For God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son...." Yes, "SO LOVED!" Today and every day, may I think, say, and mean: Thy Kingdom Come!

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