

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Nov 5th 2014

“The Lord is my light and my salvation.” So rings the psalm for today’s daily readings. It is the song of many a saint. Whom should I fear? Is there reason to be afraid? The psalmist’s response is, simply, to place her trust in the Lord. This sense of trust in the Lord is a theme throughout today’s readings. Both St. Paul and Jesus today encourage us turn to God, who will be for us a refuge and a dwelling place.

Paul encourages the Philippians to embrace with joy God who is at work in their lives. They become shining lights in a world marked and marred by sadness and sorrow. Sacrifice and struggle is the marker of the child of God – Paul is poured out and his sisters and brothers in the faith live lives of sacrificial service – but is the sign of God at work in the world. And through this struggle joy and life are brought out.

Jesus, too, invites his disciples to place their trust in the Lord. Today’s Gospel seems tough, hard, callous even. Our English translation uses the powerful word “hate” to describe the attitude of a disciple. Despite this, the invitation here is not to push aside our loved ones. Still less is it a call to a life bereft of loved ones. Rather, it is an invitation to place our trust ever more deeply into the Lord.

How does this reading end? Christ places this seeming rejection of family in the context of the cross and the self-abandonment required of the one who follows him to the cross. Carry the cross and follow. Take care to know the cost. Understand the struggle. And, in the end, renounce all you would possess.

We are called to give up, to surrender all we would hold on to. This may even mean we need to let go of our families and friends, those whom we love. Not to hate them in the sense of desiring them harm or cutting them out of our lives. Instead, to realize that it is to God we must turn and God who must be the ultimate place of trust and source of hope.

In many ways this echoes what St. Ignatius Loyola calls for in his Spiritual Exercises. His First Principle and Foundation reminds us that we ought to hold everything with an indifference; embrace what draws us closer to God with the courage to let go whatever does not. Likewise his Suscipie prayer at the close of the retreat invites us to thank God for the graces of our lives – including our friends and families – while simultaneously returning those graces to God, asking only for God’s love.

That is the invitation echoed by the readings today. To embrace the joys and graces of the world, while having the freedom to let go when necessary. To trust solely in God, our Light and our Salvation.

Today, we Jesuits also celebrate the Feast of All Saints and Blesseds of the Society of Jesus. The men whose lives were consoling examples of this freedom. What makes a man a Jesuit? What makes a man a Jesuit is the commitment to trust in God, a commitment manifest in his vows. Poverty.

Chastity. Obedience. These are not simple rules or prohibitions. Rather, they are outward examples of an inward disposition. The disposition of trust. For me, I can think of many Jesuits whose own life of trust strengthens my vocation. Especially this past year here at Creighton, I can imagine Richard Ott, Pat Malone, and Bill Harmless, whose lives were “like lights in the world” and who lived that disposition.

It is not just for Jesuits, though, this disposition of trust. Each of us is called, in a way unique to our lives, to be women and men trusting in God. Women and men who turn away from a crooked world to a path of joy. Women and men who trust God even in times of fear and distress. Women and men who can turn to God who is, always and everywhere, our light and our salvation.

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