

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, May 29th 2015

Today's readings are rich and full, like a tree laden with ripe fruit that is ready to be eaten – quite the opposite of the fig tree that had no fruit in today's gospel!

In the first reading, Sirach calls to memory godly men from Israel's past. The faithful witness of holy men and women continues through the ages, and this transmission is important to us. Sometimes that witness comes in the form of stories passed along through generations. As a convert to Catholicism, I have enjoyed learning about the saints. (It took me years to figure out that Bernadette was an historical figure, not simply a cool-sounding name favored by Catholic parents.) Sometimes those stories may contain embellishments, but the faith, courage, and good deeds they embrace help to incline our hearts toward goodness and similar feats in our own modern world.

But most folks provide a witness primarily through lives that they touch in direct and concrete ways, rather than through epic stories that continue through the ages. My good parents fall into this category. Their lives will probably not be covered by a "saint of the day" radio broadcast, but their virtue and valor has nevertheless made a favorable impact on the world around them. Last week my mother decided to visit an old family friend who had grown distant and perhaps cold toward us. I am good at words, but I would not have known what to say. (Plus I avoid uncomfortable situations whenever I can.) My mother, joined by my sister who is like her in many ways, stepped out of her comfort zone and said all that was needed with her scalloped potatoes and a cake.

Such kind gestures don't make the newspaper, but they are seen by clouds of witnesses and remembered by those who value mercy, tenderness, and wisdom, characteristics that come from years of walking humbly with God. For most of us, the tangible reminder of our existence on this earth a century from now will be a small square stone with our name on it. Few, if any, will know much about us. But our virtues endure, always in the mind of God and in that cloud of witnesses who remain forever. Hopefully they also live on in the goodness they create through lives that, in turn, touch others. Thanks, Mom, for that lesson.

Today's Gospel begins with Jesus entering the temple area. Mark says that Jesus "looked around at everything and, since it was already late, went out to Bethany with the Twelve." He would later return with decisive actions, but before those actions occurred, Jesus first paused to look around and to give himself time to assess this situation. What did he see? Did he see beauty, as well as distortion?

We are prone to grasp at things, acting as though we know all about them based on our memory or worse yet, based on how we might prefer to perceive reality. Pausing and looking again can be difficult. It might cause us to change our understanding. And perhaps might need to pause to ask the Lord to help us see correctly! I think we can all do with more of that as we approach our action plans. Perhaps then we can bear some fruit in our lives and through our prayers. Thanks be to God.

