

## Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Oct 8th 2015

“For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” Is this really true? I do think so, but it takes a while to understand how this works. It is a lifelong process that varies by each individual. This makes it difficult for non-believers to make the leap between faith as a very practical system of rules and the mysteries of faith. Let me explain what I mean. I have a brother-in-law who is not faithful. But he knows that I am very devoted to my faith and he also sees that I have a good life. He thinks I have a sort of “ask and ye shall receive” kind of faith that allows me to get things from God and for my life to go well. He also thinks I have a guardian angel that follows me around. But he is not sure he wants to live like me to receive such blessings. He can see that I don’t have all the “stuff” he has and I don’t party like he does. But despite my very conservative social values and behaviors, I have a very exciting life that a lot of people envy. He sees that I am happy and satisfied with my life. He isn’t. So he wants to know how he can have everything he has and do everything he does and still have more. He does not want to give up anything, especially his ego and his will. What he really wants, however, is to feel like God blesses him and takes care of him. He wants to feel good about himself. That is what he thinks that I have that he doesn’t think is available to him. He doesn’t know that it is.

The Old Testament lesson today says my brother-in-law is not unusual. Many people have a conversation with God that asks “what do we profit by keeping God’s command, and going about in penitential dress in awe of the Lord of hosts?” My brother-in-law and plenty of other people don’t want to be among those who “delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on it day and night.” That sounds pretty boring to them. And certainly they don’t want the faithful to declare themselves righteous and deserving while the unfaithful wicked are doomed to be set on fire. There seems to be a lot of that language in the lessons today but it isn’t about God’s judgment. Today’s lessons, like all the others, are less about how God judges us as just or wicked, but how God loves us and always welcomes us in.

In the Psalm for today, we are reminded that “the Lord watches over the way of the just, but the way of the wicked vanishes.” It isn’t about God judging the whole person as worthy or unworthy, but rather our ways. Jesus reminds us that God doesn’t give to those who ask what they request on the basis of their worthiness, but rather on the merit of their persistence. It takes faith to be persistent. Persistence in hope, however isn’t about getting what you want. It is more about persistence in learning and to live the ways of the just. In this kind of persistence, the faithful grow in faith and in love for God. They don’t lose faith when they don’t get what they want or when evil does prosper. But because they are satisfied, it seems like everything they do prospers. The good news is that everyone can open that door to prosperity.

As much as it is tempting to try to figure how to manipulate God to get what we want, it is also very tempting for those of us who do feel loved and blessed to think that somehow we are more deserving.

Sometimes we actively promote that message. That defies God. There is no room in these lessons for judgment against others. Faith is itself a gift and some of us are just more open to the words of the Lord than others. Being able to see everything in life as a gift, is itself a gift. These lessons remind us that the door to God's blessings is always open to all who ask and who seek. But some people need help to do that. It is my prayer that we the faithful live our lives in such a way that others see God's love at work in blessings in our lives that are available to everyone.

Barbara Dilly-Creighton University's Sociology and Anthropology Department