

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Oct 9th 2015

“...And the greatest of these is love.”

I think it is interesting to approach today's Gospel reading through the opening words of the prophet, Joel. “Gird yourselves and weep, O priests! Wail, O ministers of the altar! Come spend the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! The house of your God is deprived.....”

Wake up, start weeping, enter despair and commence immediately with mourning, Joel begins. The house of your God is in a state of deprivation. Deprivation by definition means the lack or denial of something that is considered to be a necessity. Joel shouts from the rooftops that something is missing in the house of their God, and that the something that is missing is like oxygen is a necessity of living and breathing. WAKE UP! Yet nothing anyone says or does really seems to awaken the slumber, not even when Jesus is the one talking.

How frustrated Jesus must have been by the power struggles he engaged in with the religious leaders of his day. “When a strong man fully armed guards his palace, his possessions are safe. But when one stronger than he attacks and overcomes him, he takes away the armor on which he relied and distributes the spoils. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters (Luke 11:21-23),” Jesus tells his critics in response to the accusation that he is in league with Satan as he drives the demons out of a suffering humanity.

All was well and good when the priests were in charge of the Church, but when the Son of God himself shows up to manifest a superior form of God's love and compassion, the power struggle is imminent. And “Jesus knew their thoughts (Luke 11:17).” “The house of your God is deprived (Joel 1:13),” Joel says, telling the priests that the house is not their own personal house but rather the house of God. And God isn't happy with how things are going.

How many people have approached their local houses and people of God and found them void of delivering on the very things God most wants to bring them, namely the delivery and healing of their demons and their wounds. What is it the house of our God is meant to provide in a suffering world? Jesus shows us, again and again and again, with his life and his choices and his actions where the focus should be. He heals, he fixes, he restores, he loves, he delivers, and he breaks the rules because the people are more important to Him than the rules.

Religious observance indeed makes people and things appear tidy on the outside. But what happens when things look good on the outside but the heart is empty of true life? ““When an unclean spirit goes out of someone, it roams through arid regions searching for rest but, finding none, it says, ‘I shall return to my home from which I came.’ But upon returning, it finds it swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and brings back seven other spirits more wicked than itself who move in and dwell there, and the last condition of that man is worse than the first (Luke 11:24-26).” Perhaps it is not so good to worry about how good things look on the outside at all, and in fact it seems a quite dangerous choice to make. It would also seem the risk and vulnerability associated with being human is unavoidable regardless of which choice we make.

