

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Aug 29th 2017

Memorial of the Passion of Saint John the Baptist

Today's readings speak to me of the importance – even the necessity – of gentleness in our lives.

In the first reading, a letter from Paul to the Thessalonians, the passage ends with these words: "... we were gentle among you, as a nursing mother cares for her children. With such affection for you, we were determined to share with you not only the Gospel of God, but our very selves as well, so dearly beloved had you become to us."

There really is nothing more gentle than a nursing mother. The bond between the mother and the nursing infant is by its nature quiet, sweet, relational, unitive, self-fulfilling and other-fulfilling at the same time. The child knows the mother and the mother knows the child in an intimacy that exists strictly between them and them alone. The fact that Paul and his companion(s) have evoked this image of gentleness in their relationship with the fledgling Christians is very comforting to me because it says a lot about the roots of our Christian faith.

The Psalmist also speaks of this gentle nature of a God who quietly and intimately knows his people, a God who is not heavy-handed but is known to "rest your hand upon me."

The Gospel, on the other hand, shows the opposite of gentleness. It displays unspeakable violence and cruelty toward John the Baptist. The callousness of Herod and everyone in the scene so vividly demonstrates what a lack of gentleness can lead to.

In these times when violence and crudeness plague our world, let us listen for the small, still voice that is God, and bask in, and learn from, its gentleness. Let us allow that gentleness to rule our hearts, our minds and our bodies.

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