

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Oct 20th 2017

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

May your kindness, O LORD, be upon us; who have put our hope in you.

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The apostle Paul uses Abraham as an example of one who put his hope in God. He trusted in God and not in himself. Abraham was an ungodly man just like everyone else. But he believed in the one "who justifies the ungodly." How could sinners justify themselves? It is impossible. Well, God, I have made many sacrifices for you. I have fed the hungry and clothed the naked. I have done all I could to keep your commandments and teach others to do the same. However, all of that will not remove a single sin. If it could, then, as Saint Paul says, I would have reason to boast. Hey, look at me, I am able to justify myself before God. In fact, I don't even need God; I can be righteous based on my own good works. God, I am so good that you owe me. Abraham's testimony is clear: only the person who trusts in God, who puts their hope in him, can be righteous. Righteousness is a gift from God. It is not something that can be earned. Paul is not denigrating the place of good works. That is perfectly clear throughout the same Letter to the Romans. But works cannot forgive me of my sins; only God can do that. And he offers forgiveness to anyone who will trust him for it. Anyone who so trusts is "blessed" - blessed to have their iniquities forgiven, their sins covered and not recorded.

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The emphasis of the psalmist is stated in a similar way: I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation. The Lord takes away our faults, covers our sins, and imputes no guilt. What must we do to experience this? We acknowledge our sins instead of trying to hide them, as if we could. We confess our sins. We strive to be a person without guile, a person who rejoices in the Lord, who lives justly, and with an upright heart. Of course, none of this could possibly justify us before God. This is the fruit of living for him. The key is that we turn to the Lord in time of trouble. We hope in him, not ourselves.

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The Gospel reading is a rebuke to hypocrites - those who appear to be one thing on the outside but are something else on the inside. They seem to think that they can get away with this before God, as if he is like the rest of us who do not really know what they are like. They do not take the counsel of the psalmist that they acknowledge and confess their sins. Instead, they hide them. Jesus says that

everything within us will be revealed and all secrets made known. A hypocrite should fear this God. He knows our hearts and has ultimate power to not only bring everything within us to light but also to cast us into hell. On the other hand, those who trust him, who have put their hope in him, need not fear. In the same way that he knows and reveal the thoughts and intents of the hypocrite, he knows those who love him. If the almost worthless sparrows cannot escape the notice of God, will God forget about us?

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