

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Jan 4th 2018

Memorial of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, Religious

Today's readings ask each of us a daunting question and then proceeds to disarm us by taking away any excuses we might offer up as we ponder our answer to that question.

How are we choosing to live our lives?

We cannot simply claim to be a Christian, our lives are so much more than that. In his letter to fellow believers, John un-mistakenly answers that profound question – “no one who is begotten of God commits sin, because God's seed remains in him” and if we are God's children we are to “act in righteousness.” But is that realistic? We are all sinners, so how is that possible?

Today's responsorial psalm provides us with part of an answer – to help us keep our focus upon God and His will for our lives. The psalm reminds us to consider all that God has done throughout history. That certainly should inspire us to keep our focus upon Jesus. But if that were not enough, the psalm goes on to remind us that all creation resounds with the joy of the Lord, and that wondrous reminder confront us every waking moment of every day.

In the book of Hebrews, Paul reminds them – and us – that God is always with us and is speaking to us. Whether through the prophets of old or through Jesus today, He understands the challenges of trying to live righteously, to avoid sin. He does not give up on us, but continues to remind us of who we are as His children, to forgive us, and to help us return to the lives He has planned for us.

In the Gospel, John provides us with a real life example of how this works. Two of John the Baptist's disciples left him to follow Jesus. Jesus undoubtedly knew of their sins and shortcomings, yet he welcomed them with open arms. They simply had to believe that Jesus was the Messiah and follow him. With the Holy Spirit living within us, it really should be no different for us than it was for Andrew & Simon Peter that day with Jesus. It is possible to keep our focus upon Jesus and to live our lives according to His holy example. We do not need to worry about perfection in that pursuit, since Jesus has already paid the price for all those times when we falter.

And if all this were not enough, we are blessed today with the memorial of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton. Her life is honored today as a perfect example of what a life lived in righteousness can look like – that it is actually possible regardless of the challenges and heartbreak that we experience throughout our lives. Elizabeth lost her mother at the age of three and endured further heartbreak and challenges throughout her life. Yet through it all, she continued the social ministry of nursing the sick and dying, working through and developing various charitable organizations. Her service focus expanded to education, where she established a school for Catholic girls, which spawned the Catholic parochial school system and continues blessing us all today through orphanages, schools and hospitals. Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton certainly provides us with a glimpse of what a righteous life can accomplish in our world. She refused to use setbacks and challenges as excuses for losing sight of what God called her to.

Dear Heavenly Father, forgive me when I so easily give up trying to live a sinless life, a life of

righteousness. Help me to see you and all that you are in every moment of my life. To realize that I do not, nor could not, accomplish righteousness on my own, that you are always with me to guide me and to forgive me when I so often fail. Use my life to make a difference, to serve as a conduit pointing others to you.

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