

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Feb 28th 2013

When reflecting on the text from Jeremiah in today's first reading, it dawned on me that these words clearly show that the frequently heard opposition of faith and science is not supported by Biblical teaching.

God says in this text that the individual, "who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the Lord" is cursed. In other words, God critiques a way of life that relies only on human strengths, talents, experiences, and wisdom, but ignores him. God challenges an understanding of life that is not grounded in faith and trust in him and his plan for the world. We should trust in him and use our talents, hone our skills, and give our best to improve the human condition, inspired by his teaching. There is nothing in the Sacred Scriptures that says otherwise. In contrast, religious involvement that is not also guided by human wisdom, science, and hard work is seen in both the Old and New Testament as empty and useless. Holding hands and singing Kumbaya by itself has never triggered positive social changes that indicate the imminent growth of the Kingdom of God. Such behavior only makes us feel good.

Jesus' parable in today's Gospel gives us an example of what it means to trust in God and to trust in the "strength of the flesh." We hear of a rich man who did not recognize the poor man lying at his door. After the rich man died, he began to understand that ignoring the suffering of his contemporaries is contrary to God's will. He realized that he had not trusted God, who is the champion of the marginalized, and that he had not used his strength, skills, and resources to do what God wanted him to do.

We, today, are in the same situation as the rich man in the parable. Many of our contemporaries are suffering, "lying at our doors." Do we trust the Lord who is the defender of the poor, who calls us to do our best to improve their condition using our resources and skills? If someone is struggling now, we need to give immediate assistance and at the same time we need to use all our talents, wisdom, and professional skills to prevent suffering from happening. In other words, we are asked to be charitable and to simultaneously work towards social justice. When we do so, we trust in the Lord and are "like a tree planted beside the waters: it fears not the heat when it comes, its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit."

During Lent, let us pray for trust in the Lord, for charity with the poor, and for inspiration to use our skills, knowledge and expertise to change social realities that cause suffering for many in our society and our world.

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