

Eight Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2017

The readings of this Sunday talk about God's providence. They show that God cares for our welfare, as well as he cares for the birds and flowers in the field. They invite us to trust God and put all our problems and needs into his hands.

The first reading describes the state of mind of the people of Israel at the time of exile. It shows that because of their sufferings, they came to believe that God had abandoned them. It also gives us God's answer to them in terms of assurance and protection.

What is behind this text is the idea that God accompanies his people continually through the meander of their history. Another idea is the affirmation of the faithfulness of God who can never abandon his people whatever might be the circumstances of their life. The last idea is relative to the truth that the experience of suffering brings many to doubt about God's presence and care for them.

This text allows us to understand the stakes of today's Gospel as Jesus speaks of God's providence. First of all, the Gospel starts with Jesus' invitation to serve one master and not two, that is, God and money. It also gives the reason why it would be better to serve one master by referring to the love of one and the hate of the other.

Then, the Gospel talks about Jesus recommendation to his disciples to be worryless about life in its basic necessities like food, drink or clothes. It also gives the reason why they have to do so by showing how life is more than food and the body more than the clothes.

After that, the Gospel describes two examples given by Jesus through which he shows how God in his providence takes care of his creatures. First, it reports an example relative to the birds that do not sow, reap or gather in barns, but have always their food in abundance. Second, it refers to the flowers which do not work or spin, but are always colorful, varied, and beautifully well dressed.

Finally, the Gospel makes a concrete application to the life of the disciples by showing why they should be worryless, first, by evoking the fact that people cannot change the span of their life because of their worries and, second, by referring to the example of birds and flowers who are less important than human beings.

In the end, the Gospel reports Jesus' invitation that his disciples be different from pagans and seek first God's Kingdom and his righteousness while everything else will be given them. In the same way, it reports Jesus' statement, namely that tomorrow will take care of itself and each day has enough trouble for itself.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about God's providence over us. In fact, we have been educated in such a way that we have to work hard and to count on ourselves in order to succeed in life. True enough; when we give all our best to what we do, we will certainly succeed and enjoy the fruit of our efforts and endeavors.

There is nothing wrong in doing so and it would even be irresponsible not to do so. In truth, if we do nothing, we cannot expect something good to happen to us. To work hard, to count on ourselves in order to succeed is certainly a sign that we take our responsibility very seriously.

However, one thing is to be responsible and to count on ourselves, and another is to think that all the results of our endeavor come from our personal efforts. Of course, the results of our endeavors come from our efforts, but in so far as God blesses us. As psalm 127 says, if the Lord does not build the house, it is in vain that the workers build; if he does not watch over the city, it is in vain that the watchers stand guard. In that sense, it is God who allows our endeavors and business to prosper. Of course, we work hard and bring in the best of our skills and intelligence, but it is God who keeps us in good shape and health so that we are able to do all that.

That is why, when Jesus is inviting us not to be anxious about food or clothing, he wants us to open our eyes and recognize the part God plays in our life. There is no denial of the existence of anxiety, as though he is promising us a care-free life. That would be unrealistic. Normally, anxiety is part of what it means to be human. For instance, if someone is unemployed and does not know how he will pay the rent tomorrow, he will certainly be anxious. In the same way, if a father has nothing for feeding his family, he will certainly be anxious and afraid about tomorrow. Such anxiety is legitimate.

The anxiety about which Jesus is talking against is that which consumes us completely as though there is no way out of our problem, that which destroys our energy and makes us hopeless as though God has abandoned us. I believe that it is against such anxiety we were praying in the old translation of the Mass, when we said "Protect us from all anxiety as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ".

That is why Jesus is inviting us to put our anxiety in the large context of God's kingdom, meaning that we have to put the kingdom of God above anything else, knowing that God will provide for what we need for our body and our life. In that sense, we have to give the best of ourselves and of our skills in what we undertake with the awareness that God will bless us, because that is His will.

In other words, we take actions and work hard, but with the awareness that we depend upon God's will to bless our efforts. It is not a question of crossing the arms as though the manna will come from heaven, but of working with diligence or assiduity as though everything depended on us because precisely it depends on God. It is a question of depending upon God and of counting seriously on his providence, even where we have to work hard in order to succeed. That is the grace to ask in this celebration. May God bless you all!

Isaiah 49: 14-15; Corinthians 4: 1-5; Matthew 6: 24-34



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