



Come and See!

Week of August 23, 2020

The Word...

I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with all my heart...
I will give thanks to your name, because of your kindness and your truth:
When I called, you answered me; you built up strength within me.
The LORD is exalted, yet the lowly he sees,
and the proud he knows from afar.
Your kindness, O LORD, endures forever;
forsake not the work of your hands.
(from Ps 138)

Pondering the Word...

Several of the readings this week talk about preparing for the Lord's return: "Stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour," (Mt 25:13). The fatalistic saying, "Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" comes from Isaiah 22:13, right before today's Old Testament passage. Paul warns the Thessalonians to ignore those who have abandoned work thinking the day of the Lord is imminent, and encouraging the faithful to stay strong. We hear of doomsday cults and predictions in modern times as well, and I must admit, there are instances when I read the news and wonder, "Ok, has God had enough?"

How does one stay strong and hopeful? How does one stay awake, aware, and prepared? The answer is found in today's psalm, "A Hymn of a Grateful Heart:" Gratitude.

"Really? Can it be that simple?"

Remember Meister Eckhart's advice: "If the only prayer we ever say is thank you, it will be enough." Gratitude recognizes the primacy of God. It says we realize and are thankful that all we are and all we have is a gift from God. It acknowledges that even when ill befalls us, we trust in God's will for our welfare. Gratitude praises God for his generosity, kindness, and mercy, the very things in which God delights! It is not blind optimism in the face of sorrow and pain, but the knowledge that even amidst difficulty, God is by our side.

It really is that simple. Remember to say thank you many times throughout the day. Each time we thank God, he builds our hope and strength to face whatever lies ahead.

Living the Word...

"Gratitude is not a passive response to something we have been given, gratitude arises from paying attention, from **being awake** in the presence of everything that lives within and without us. Gratitude is not necessarily something that is shown after an event, it is the deep, *a priori* state of attention that shows we understand the gifted nature of life." (From *Consolations* by David Whyte)

Take out your schedule and find times throughout each day to look around, be aware, and say thank you. Put a reminder on your phone if you need to. And be specific. Tell God exactly what you are thankful for in that moment. And while you're at it, think about people in your life who make a difference for you. Say thanks!

Personal Reflections and Ideas...

Mon, Aug 24: *"We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth." Nathanael said, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus said of him, "Here is a true child of Israel. There is no duplicity in him." (Jn 1:45-51)*

Many of the recent readings address the type of people the Lord cannot abide: hypocrites. Nathanael (aka Bartholomew) makes a snide remark about Jesus' hometown. It's not clear whether Jesus overhears him, but he compliments Nathanael for his honesty. If there's one thing Jesus doesn't like, it is hypocrisy. *How do we do on this front? Do we mean what we say and say and do what we mean? Do our actions reflect the faith we espouse?*

Tue, Aug 25: *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity. But these you should have done, without neglecting the others. Blind guides, who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel!" (Mt 23:23-26)*

Let's talk about straining gnats, a favorite activity for hypocrites. Hypocrites like to distract others from their egregious and duplicitous behavior by calling attention to the little things they have done in the name of the law. We see it happen in governments, organized religions, and other organizations where politics and egos tend to overtake the mission. But we can see it when we look in the mirror. *Take time today to reflect on those areas in your life where you "dot all the Is and cross all the Ts," but may be missing the spirit behind the letter of the law.*

Wed, Aug 26: *"Woe to you hypocrites. You build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the memorials, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have joined them in shedding the prophets' blood.' You bear witness that you are children of those who murdered the prophets; now fill up what your ancestors measured out!" (Mt 23:27-32)*

If you do not see the parallels in this reading to the national discussion in the US about race and the sin of slavery, then you need to look closer. I remember thinking Jesus' words to the elders in this passage were not in line with Ezekiel 18, when God says the sins of the fathers and mothers are not transferred to the children. But look again: God says that if the children learn from the sins of their parents, if they change their hearts, then they will not bear the weight of the parents' sins. Jesus knows the elders will kill him. They have not learned or changed their hearts. Given some of the actions and dialogue happening in my country these days, the fact that neither I nor my ancestors owned slaves is not the point. Have the sins of the fathers been rectified? Have the sons and daughters changed their hearts? *Worth some prayer and deep reflection, don't you think?*

Thu, Aug 27: *"Stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come." (Mt 24:42-51)*

Let us pray for all those who have lost their lives to the COVID-19 pandemic. For many, the reality of Jesus' words today ring hauntingly true. We pray for God's mercy on all of them, especially those who might not have been well prepared, and for their loved ones. And we pray God will help each of us to do what we need to prepare for the coming of our Lord.

Fri, Aug 28: *"Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the Gospel, and not with the wisdom of human eloquence, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning... we proclaim Christ crucified..." (1 Cor 1:17-25)*

This passage is one of Paul's most powerful testimonies. It might be easier and more pleasant for us to proclaim Christ as incarnated or Christ as risen. What does it mean to proclaim "Christ crucified?" There have been times in ancient and recent history when this proclamation has been used as an excuse for revenge! *Spend time in prayer today: what --to you, not to the catechism text -- is the meaning of the cross of Christ? What does proclaiming Christ crucified look like in your daily life? Is it an excuse to be miserable or to condemn? Or is it a source of hope? What will you do (or not do) today to make sure Christ's cross is not emptied of its meaning?*

Sat, Aug 29: *"...as it is written, 'Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord.'" (1 Cor 1:26-31)*

Paul quotes a beautiful verse from Jeremiah (9:22-23): *"Thus says the Lord, 'Let the wise man not boast of his wisdom, nor the warrior boast of his might. Let the rich man not boast of his riches. But in this, may he who boasts boast: understanding and knowing me for I am the Lord doing kindness, justice, and righteousness in the land; for in these I delight,' says the Lord."* In these times of authoritarian leaders who boast of their so-called wisdom, wealth, and power, we would do well to remember the things in which God delights: kindness, justice, and righteousness. Do we understand and know God? Are we kind and just? If not, we have no grounds to boast!