



Come and See!

Week of November 6, 2022

The Word ...

“Brothers and sisters: May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting encouragement and good hope through his grace, encourage your hearts and strengthen them in every good deed and word. ... pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may speed forward and be glorified, as it did among you, and that we may be delivered from perverse and wicked people, for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil. ...May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God.”
(from 2 Thes 2:16-3:5)

Pondering the Word ...

Several readings this week are timely and provocative, at least for people in the United States. It's election time again, and the vitriol and violence, which I keep thinking can't get any worse, continues to escalate.

I stumble over Paul's words about being delivered from “perverse and wicked people.” It's sad that on either side of the political and Christian divide, this prayer might be prayed earnestly as each side sees the other as the enemy, perverse and wicked. I understand Paul's concern here: this new religious sect—The Way—is spreading quickly and there are varying interpretations particularly when it comes to Jewish law. But are these other people wicked? Are they purposely trying to pervert Christ's teachings? Or are they just trying to hold on to their status as “chosen,” unaware that being chosen is not a privilege but a responsibility?

The most important words in this reading for all of us: “*May the Lord direct your hearts to love.*” No matter what label we put on each other, this is the truth: If something is not of love, mercy, and compassion, it is not of God.

Living the Word ...

You cannot rightly call yourself a Christian if you promote violence, hate speech, and injustice. If there is anything antithetical to the Cross of Christ, it is violence promoted and perpetrated on our fellow human beings. I admit I struggle with those who see nationalism as something on par with their Christian faith. To me, it is a contradiction in terms and cuts awfully close to idolatry, putting too much faith in principalities.

Let us pray earnestly this week for all countries holding elections and in the midst of power struggles right now, that God will direct us in the way of love and tolerance, and that we can find paths to compromise and peace. Let us pray for the protection of those who lead us and for all of us who peacefully exercise our rights to vote and gather. Soften our hearts, Lord, as we strive to bring about, not the Kingdom of America or Brazil or India or Iran, but the Kingdom of God.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Nov 7: *“Woe to the one through whom [sin] occurs. It would be better for him if a millstone were put around his neck and he be thrown into the sea than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin”* (Lk 17:1-6). In the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Michael Patella, O.S.B. explains that millstones were costly equipment in ancient Palestine and highly valued. It would be a big sacrifice for a community to use it to punish sin. **Reflection/Provision:** Let’s not get too caught up with the severe punishment of the sinner but think about it another way: This story is saying a community needs to be willing to give up something it values in order to make amends for the egregious behavior of its members. It doesn’t need to be something of material value; it could be reputation or an image the community has fostered for itself. Reflect on what this means in church, government, or academic communities not willing to risk what they value even when the community itself ignored sin in its midst. What about my own complicity in societal sin? Where do I choose to turn away? What things do I condone or participate in that I am not willing to give up, even in the face of someone else’s sin?

Tue, Nov 8: *“When you have done all you have been commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do’”* (Lk 17:7-10). **Reflection/Provision:** Who or what do you serve? “God,” you say, but how do you hear God? Is it through your informed conscience or what someone else tells you? Is it from a political party? Your calendar or bank account? Jesus says, *“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business”* (Jn 15:15). Some say, *“I do what I am ‘obliged’ to do,”* rather than reflecting on what Jesus has shared. Today in the US, an informed individual conscience is paramount. Let’s use our right to vote wisely.

Wed, Nov 9: *[Jesus] made a whip out of cords and drove them out of the temple area* (Jn 2:13-22). *“In the Greek it is clear that Jesus uses the braided or tied cords simply to herd the sheep and oxen out of the compound, not to thrash the moneychangers”* (The New Testament: A Translation, DB Hart, 2017). Jesus is mad. The money changers have taken over some sacred space in the Temple which should be, to any observant Jew, an abomination. I guess the officials are so set on keeping the peace that they let it happen in plain sight. **Reflection/ Provision:** This passage is an example of “righteous anger,” not what some people say is Jesus’ A-OK for violence. Let’s remember we are all God’s temple (today’s reading from 1st Cor). Cleansing the temples of our souls is necessary, particularly of things that cause injustice. Dramatic acts such as peaceful marches may need to occur to get society’s attention, but there can be no such thing as violence in Jesus’ name. Work today for peace and justice.

Thu, Nov 10: *“For behold, the Kingdom of God is among you”* (Lk 17:20-25). **Reflection/Provision:** It doesn’t matter if the translation is “among” or within,” God’s Kingdom is now. Jesus is not telling the Pharisees that his presence makes God’s Kingdom a reality. God’s Kingdom is everywhere, within and without. Put the phone down. Get rid of the newsfeed. Look around. Be aware of the signs of God’s Kingdom. They are everywhere.

Fri, Nov 11: *“Remember the wife of Lot. Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it”* (Lk 17:26-37). Why did Lot’s wife look back on Sodom? Morbid curiosity? To confirm her husband’s choice to leave? Or was she looking back longingly on her past life? It seems Jesus thinks it’s the third reason. She didn’t want to give up the comfortable life she was accustomed to. **Reflection/Provision:** In Lk 9:62, Jesus tells us to look ahead, not back at what’s left behind; to move forward at the prompting of the Spirit. I’m sure we all have things that give us comfort that we’d like to see continue, but let’s ask ourselves: Is comfort available to all people, or just to those who look, worship, or think like me? What needs to change so that everyone has the opportunity to save their lives?

Sat, Nov 12: *There was a judge in a certain town who neither feared God nor respected any human being. And a widow in that town used to come to him and say, ‘Render a just decision for me against my adversary’”* (Lk 18:1-8). Widows in Jesus’ time were usually pitiful; the very ones Jesus instructed us to care and provide for. This widow doesn’t appear pitiful to me! She’s feisty and persistent, unwilling to take “no” for an answer or back down from her adversary. Maybe she’s the same widow at the temple, putting in her “two cents,” trusting God but also not willing to be dismissed by the temple elite. **Reflection/Provision:** When we approach God in prayer, we may see ourselves as pitiful, unworthy to approach the throne. And that’s true, but God invites us to be persistent, praying without becoming weary as we work for justice and to be strengthened against the adversary that challenges us each day. If nothing else, say several times throughout the day, “Thy will be done.”