



The Word...

There is no god besides you who have the care of all...
For your might is the source of justice;
your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all. ...
But though you are master of might, you judge with clemency,
and with much lenience you govern us...
And you taught your people, by these deeds,
that those who are just must be kind;
and you gave your children good ground for hope
that you would permit repentance for their sins
(from Wis 12:13, 16-19).

Pondering the Word ...

Last year, I visited an exhibit in Washington, D.C. that was sponsored by an organization with which I am affiliated, the Ignatian Volunteer Corps. Called "Invisible Words," the exhibit is a collection of signs purchased from people begging on the streets. One sign in particular struck me: "I am not a bad girl. I have just made some bad decisions." It prompted me to look back on bad decisions I have made in my life and to reflect: there's very little that separates me from the anonymous author of these words.

Chapter 12 from the Book of Wisdom—and indeed all of the Book of Wisdom—is worth a thoughtful read. (Note: It's not found in the Hebrew Masoretic text—it was written about 50 years before Christ—and is found in the Apocrypha of the King James Bible.) Like the psalms and prophetic writings, the book juxtaposes God's punishing might and power with God's mercy and compassion. This chapter focuses on God's patience, giving us time to reflect and repent our wrongdoing so that we are then able to be merciful to others.

Our human tendency is to focus on threats to our being, so many of us hold onto the "bad decisions" we have made like some war wounds of battle, acknowledging at least on the surface, God's mercy, but failing to forgive ourselves. So, we live in fear of punishment rather than in the joy of mercy.

In his book, *Just Mercy*, Bryan Stevenson writes, "Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done." We have "good ground for hope" that God sees much, much more in us than the worse thing we've ever done. Let us be just and kind and start to see that in ourselves and in others as well.

Living the Word...

I love this line: "your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all." No, we are not God. We will never have mastery over much, but that shouldn't stop us from striving to have mastery over ourselves. (Spoiler alert: we will never have that completely!) What I mean by having mastery really comes down to awareness: to allow the Spirit to gently point out to us, through our consciences, when we stray and when we are called to use our strengths and gifts to share God's mercy. The more we are able to "master" ourselves, the more loving and compassionate we can be to others when they stray. If you hold onto past wrongdoing, unable to forgive yourself, or find you are not very kind or merciful to others, seek the companionship of a compassionate spiritual guide who can lead you to praise and celebrate both the might and mercy of our loving God.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Jul 24: *"Fear not! Stand your ground. The LORD himself will fight for you; you have only to keep still"* (Ex 14: 5-18). The Egyptians are hot on the tails of the fleeing Israelites. They, of course, start hollering at Moses who tells them to pipe down and keep still. But they can't really stand their ground and keep still—they have to walk between the walls of water held back by Moses' staff! The stillness Moses calls for here is the stillness of heart that only faith can bring. Our lives are indeed in God's hands, but we can't sit back idly. Courage and faith are needed to trust in God's providence, even in the most difficult and perilous situations. **Provision:** If you are facing a challenging situation—even if that challenge is just getting up each day—pray with this story and heed the words of Moses. Or, as the Native American adage says, *"Trust in God but paddle the canoe!"*

Tue, Jul 25: *"We hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us"* (2 Cor 4:7-15). Have you heard of the Japanese art of *Kintsugi*: the repairing of broken pottery with precious metals? It's a wonderful representation of Paul's words and reflects the message of Sunday's gospel. Earthen vessels are imperfect and can break quite easily, but if we allow the gold of God's power to repair and restore us, we become even more beautiful and valuable, not only to God but also to those who observe us. **Provision:** If you are broken or believe the vessel of your life is beyond repair, turn to the Master Artisan today so God can begin the delicate work of putting you back together. Be patient: such intricate work takes time. If you are aware of someone who feels this way about themselves, the Master welcomes apprentices with gentle hands!

Wed, Jul 26: *On seeing [the manna], the children of Israel asked, "What is this?" for they did not know what it was* (Ex 16:1-5, 9-15). God is a God of surprises. God's answer to our prayers may not look anything like what we expect or have ever imagined before. **Provision:** If you've been fervently praying for something and you are not seeing what you expect, take some time to consider "the manna" God may be sending you instead. Pray the Spirit will grant you the eyes to see and the ears to hear God's answer to your prayers.

Thu, Jul 27: *"To anyone who has, more will be given; from anyone who has not, what he has will be taken"* (Mt 13:10-17). The context of this verse has to do with why Jesus speaks to the crowds in parables. He's aware direct discussion about the Father and the coming of the Kingdom will only serve to confuse or alienate them. So, he tells the people stories, a common technique in rabbinical teaching, using words and settings familiar to them. It is the Spirit who will open the ears and hearts of some in the crowd to look beyond the story to its real meaning. The more we allow Jesus' words to penetrate our hearts, the more insight and faith we will be given. **Provision:** It might seem easier at times to sit and listen without hearing and letting the weight of Jesus' message sink in. But if his words remain on the surface of our lives, the meaning will be lost for us. The next time you read or hear Jesus' words, take your time to ascertain the lesson. Let the Spirit open you to more.

Fri, Jul 28: *"For I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their fathers' wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation"* (Ex 20:1-17). Frankly, I prefer Ezekiel's take: *"The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child"* (18:20). But how often do we see the "sins" of the parents passed down generation upon generation: substance abuse, child abuse, etc. And that's not to mention the punishment we inflict through our worship of immediate gratification and material goods, by our tolerance of injustice, and by our wanton use of the earth's resources. It is not God punishing the generations to come, but our own sin on which we will be judged. **Provision:** Go back to Monday's reflection. God expects us to participate in creation. Reflect on this, especially if you dismiss the burden we are leaving for our children and grandchildren.

Sat, Jul 29: *"Offer to God praise as your sacrifice and fulfill your vows to the Most High; Then call upon me in time of distress; I will rescue you, and you shall glorify me"* (Ps 50). We might be tempted to read some of the psalms as a sort of *quid pro quo*: I offer sacrifice, God is there for me in distress, I glorify God, and this nice back-and-forth goes on indefinitely...except God is not dependent on our sacrifices. We don't dictate God by what we do or don't do. God is God and God is love. So, what we "sacrifice" is our ego's need to think we are in control. **Provision:** Give thanks today for nothing more or less than God being the God of love in our lives!