



The Word...

“For the haughty men have risen up against me,
the ruthless seek my life; they set not God before their eyes”
(Ps 54).

Pondering the Word ...

This week’s readings are wonderful. Gorgeous, rich with meaning and lessons for our lives today. Depending on your perspective, they speak either to wonder and awe in the face of the Mystery, or to the futility of human existence. Perspective: the theme for our reflections and prayer this week. If you don’t typically read scripture each day, this would be a good week to give it a go.

“They have set not God before their eyes.” The Message translation is more jarring: “God means nothing to them.”

In James’ letter today, he admonishes us to look at the source of unhappiness, conflict, and war: our own passions, jealousy, and selfish ambition...our own perspective versus the will of God. Jesus is gentler in his rebuke of the disciples and their debate about which one is the greatest: *“If anyone wishes to be first, they shall be the last of all and the servant of all.”*

How different the perspective of the world from the perspective of Scripture! I “squirm in my seat” when I realize how far I am from living the lessons I am supposed to be learning, how often my perspective is clouded by my own selfishness and desires. While I’m sorry to say there are some among the rich and powerful in this world to whom God means nothing, I think most of us just need to be reminded each day to set God before our eyes, to look at things from God’s point of view. To look for greatness in being last.

“All the ways of a man may be right in his own eyes, but it is the Lord who proves hearts” (Prv 21).

Living the Word ...

What do you do to “set God before your eyes” each day? Do you try to stop in the middle of the day to examine where and whether you see God’s reflection? Are you looking through God’s eyes or your own eyes? We might not realize how often our long-standing perspectives and opinions, passed down from generation to generation, can color our view. These can keep us from seeing God in all things and looking at all things through God’s eyes.

Challenge yourself this week. Start each day by consciously putting God before your eyes. At midday, do a quick examen: “Where have I seen God today?” “Was I able to take God’s perspective on the people and situations I encountered?” End the day looking back: “Where might I have missed God today?” Go to sleep peacefully, confident that “our protector does not slumber or sleep,” watching over us with love.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Sep 23: *"Refuse no one the good on which he has a claim when it is in your power to do it for him"* (Prv 3:27-34). Here's an interesting question about perspective. *"Forbear not to do good to the poor, whensoever thy hand may have power to help him"* is the translation from *The Septuagint*: Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, 1851). The first translation mentions helping someone who has a "claim" — a day laborer, perhaps, to whom you owe wages. The second is different. There is no mention of the other having "a claim." How do you view the poor and their rights? Do you believe, as Pope Francis likes to remind us, that the basic necessities of life are not a privilege but a right. Do the poor have a claim to a share of the good in the world? **Provision: Examine your perspective.** For me, the second translation says I should not hesitate to give to beggars on the street, given I have the power to help. When you and I look at the poor, do we see them as having a claim on that which is rightfully theirs, or do we adhere to "beggars can't be choosers?" How do you deal with the poor in our midst?

Tue, Sep 24: *"Like a stream is the king's heart in the hand of the LORD; wherever it pleases him, he directs it"* (Prv 21:1-6, 10-13). There's a creek that runs behind our house. It's strewn with rocks and roots. Over the years, it has been dry as a bone, and it has overflowed into the backyard. As far as I can see, there is no straight or unencumbered stretch as the stream winds its way to join other streams on its trek to the river. A good metaphor for life! **Provision: Let God hold your heart.** Allowing God to hold your heart and direct it as God pleases does not mean everything will run smoothly. There will be rocks and roots aplenty! But it does mean your life will find its way to its destination. Are you in good hands? God's hands?

Wed, Sep 25: *"Two things I ask of you...: give me neither poverty nor riches; ... Lest, being full, I deny you, saying, 'Who is the LORD?' Or, being in want, I steal and profane the name of my God"* (Prv 30:5-9). There's a saying attributed to Gandhi: *"The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed."* It's another perspective on Monday's reflection. It appears the author(s) of Proverbs are referring to the "allotted portion," an Old Testament term that describes the plot of land Israelite families were given to provide for their sustenance. But it is also used to describe something that is "enough." **Provision: "Enough is enough."** Man, I struggle with this one! I have more than enough. What's your opinion? Many of the readings this week present a perspective that bears little resemblance to how we live, at least in many parts of the Western world. Reflect today on what is "enough" in your life. What would you change in order that *all* have enough?

Thu, Sep 26: *"All is mere breath...The eye is not sated with seeing nor the ear filled with hearing"* (Eccl [Qohelet]: 1:2–11, Hebrew translation). *"Teach us to number our days aright that we may gain wisdom of heart"* (Ps 90). One can choose to embrace the Mystery of God's perspective — "a thousand years are as yesterday" — or one can be baffled and discouraged by the futility and frailty of human life. Where do you stand in the face of Mystery? **Provision: Rejoice in the Mystery.** I think the essential message of Qohelet is this: "Get over yourself! You are not God, and you won't figure this out!" This is not to say we don't strive to learn more, to go deeper into the mystery that is God and creation. But it is faith that allows us to embrace what we cannot know, trusting in the love and mercy of our Creator. Rejoice!

Fri, Sep 27: *"There is an appointed time for everything...God has made everything appropriate to its time"* (Eccl 3:1-11). **Provision: What time is it?** (And not as Yogi Berra would answer: "Ya mean now?" 😊) Read this oft-quoted passage. Read it slowly and deliberately. What is happening in your life right now? I tend to think we live most of our lives "in between," no longer weeping or mourning, yet not quite ready to laugh and dance. But this perspective of being where we are according to God's timing is helpful in allowing ourselves to accept and be present to what is, letting the Spirit teach us what we are to learn. Make time to be where you are.

Sat, Sep 28 *"And dust returns to the earth as it was, and the life breath returns to God who gave it"* (Eccl 11:9-12:8). **Provision: Remember: "We are dust and unto dust we will return. We are Love and unto Love we will return."** It's both...but... I guess it all depends on your perspective.