



The Word ...

“Before the LORD the whole universe is as a grain from a balance or a drop of morning dew come down upon the earth. But you have mercy on all... and you overlook people's sins that they may repent. For you love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made; for what you hated, you would not have fashioned. And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it; or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you? But you spare all things, because they are yours, O LORD and lover of souls.”
(from Wis 11:22-12:2)

“The LORD is good to all and compassionate toward all his works.”
(from Ps 145)

Pondering the Word ...

I am in awe of the incredible images coming from the Webb Telescope. They give us a glimpse into the vast and beautiful expanse of the universe, at least the part we are aware of now. They remind us in a visceral way that the earth is a mere speck on “a grain from a balance,” fragile and vulnerable. It makes us feel vulnerable as well.

I keep that in mind as I contemplate the beautiful readings this week about the universality of God's mercy. The Book of Wisdom, found in Catholic bibles and in the apocrypha of Protestant bibles, is full of rich and comforting images (along, of course, with the requisite cautions just for good measure)!

We sometimes hear the phrase, “the God of the Old Testament.” We depict this God as harsh and jealous, judgmental, the great Accountant, striking down enemies and evil-doers. To be fair, this is the image in many of the stories from the Pentateuch, also known as the Book of Moses, written about the tribal Israelites who were people of their times. Our humanity tends to make us more alert to threats to our safety than to images of comfort, and so we try to control this angry God by rigidly following all the rules. Be honest here: How often do you think of God as a “lover of souls?” Yet the Old Testament is replete with words and stories of God's mercy.

How might your life be different, how might you treat people differently if you to really believed in the truth that God loves all things and all people, and loathes *nothing* he has made?

Living the Word ...

What do you think when you hear God loves all things he has made? That everything and everyone has been called forth by him, so there is nothing, no one to be hated or discarded? All are created in God's image. Do we truly believe that when we look at enemies of democracy, people whose gender identity doesn't align with our views, oil barons, or school shooters? Maybe we struggle to look at ourselves as loved.

It is tough work to be a lover of souls; only God can do this without fail. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try. Be merciful, compassionate, and kind today. Love someone that is hard for you to love. Love yourself.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Oct 31: *“Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you”* (Phil 2:1-4). **Reflection/Provision:** This verse makes me think: “Why do I do the ‘charitable’ things I do?” I’d like to say my intentions are altruistic, but I’m not so sure that is always the case. There’s the “I’m supposed to do” reason for doing good. Or the, “Well, if I want to get to heaven” thing. Maybe it’s that “It makes me feel good” reason. And of course, there’s always the risk of doing so people will think more of me. I’m reminded of the reading from Ash Wednesday: *“When you give to the needy, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”* (Mt 6:3). Have you ever experienced being thanked by someone for a “gift” you didn’t even know you’d given them? It’s so humbling to think that the Spirit has used you in this way! Reflect today: What motivates you to do the good you do? Strive to understand why you do good to see if you are meeting others’ needs and not just our own. Giving and service is always **To**, not **From**.

Tue, Nov 1: *“Beloved, we are God’s children now”* (1 Jn 3:1-3). **Reflection/Provision:** Most important word? NOW. We are God’s children NOW. Not in some far-off celestial future. Right here, right now. We are, each one, saints in the making. I always wonder what the author of this letter means when they say we will know what we will be when we see God. We have seen God: *“By his words and his praxis, Jesus himself changed the content of the word God”* (Albert Nolan, O.P., RIP). Today, many Christians celebrate All Saints Day, recognizing those who, by their words and praxis, live lives that reveal to us the image of God in Christ. We too can, however imperfectly, present the face of Christ to others. And yes, we can always see God as he is. Jesus told us where: In the faces of the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the imprisoned, the oppressed...

Wed, Nov 2: *“He guides me in right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage behold will be last”* (Ps 23). I’m intrigued by the subtle transition in this psalm as the author moves from their head to their heart. In the first verses, God is referred to in the third person (“He guides me”). The author extols the care that God gives them. Then, it becomes personal. The author is speaking directly to God (“You are at my side”). **Reflection/Provision:** This is a great model for prayer. St Ignatius of Loyola stresses the importance of moving from an intellectual type of prayer (head) to a prayer deep from our hearts, a prayer that listens more than it speaks. Pay attention to your prayer today. If you find you talk about God, or at God and not with God, converse directly. Express gratitude from your heart.

Thu, Nov 3: *“Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep... Rejoice because I have found the coin that I lost.’ In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents”* (Lk 15: 1-10). **Reflection/Provision:** A message in this reading we might overlook, especially for the 99 sheep that stay put, or for the nine other coins that don’t go rolling off somewhere: The value of the lost item does not diminish the value of the items that remain. The shepherd will go after any one of the sheep that strays; the woman will search for whatever coin is lost. The joy is not only because the one is found; there is joy that what was incomplete is now whole. Heaven rejoices in it all. Celebrate anyone who is found, especially if it’s you!

Fri, Nov 4: *“For many, as I have often told you conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ... Their God is their stomach; their minds are occupied with earthly things”* (Phil 3:17-4:1). “Their God is their STOMACH?” Is this one of Paul’s metaphors? Thayer’s Greek Lexicon indicates Paul is being specific — “given up to pleasures of the palate.” **Reflection/Provision:** Paul may be accusing these “enemies” of gluttony, greed, or an unwillingness to share their bounty with others. Whatever it is, earthly things have replaced God as the center of their lives. I wonder if these folks have any idea that has happened! Look around your life: Is there anything slowly supplanting God? Popularity, financial success, security? Physical appearance, sports prowess, fame?

Sat, Nov 5: *“Good is the man who shows grace and lends, he sustains his words with justice”* (Ps 112, Hebrew translation). **Reflection/Provision:** In other words, the good person doesn’t just talk the talk, they walk the walk. In fact, going back to Monday’s reflection, the good person can be one who doesn’t talk at all. They quietly let their gracious and just actions speak for themselves. We hear a lot of chatter about justice, but when it comes to real-world action, we often retreat into our protected enclaves. Perhaps it is security that has become our God? What will you do today to walk the walk by companionship those striving for justice?