



Come and See!

July 8, 2018

The Word...

To you I lift up my eyes who are enthroned in heaven —
as the eyes of servants are on the hands of their masters.
As the eyes of a maid are on the hands of her mistress,
so are our eyes on the LORD, our God, till he have pity on us.
Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy.
Have pity on us, O LORD, have pity on us,
(from Ps 123)

“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”
(from 2 Cor 12:7-10)

Pondering the Word...

“Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy.”

Throughout the Old Testament, there is a discernable pattern: God reaffirms his covenant and his mercy and the Israelites accept both, only to fall into sinful patterns again and again. Which of course, is followed, after a time of “reflection,” by God’s compassionate recommitment and mercy to his people.

In this psalm we hear the peoples’ ‘eyes are lifted up to the Lord.’ Yes, they’ve probably done some head-hanging, distressed by the condition into which their sinfulness has led them. But they are not afraid or ashamed to look directly to God—even to “fix their eyes--on God, not only in spite of their wrongdoing, but almost because of it. In his book, *Stories of God*, John Shea offers this interesting insight: “*The Israelites are never submissive, never resigned to their oppression and exile. They expect rescue and expect it from the very God under whose judgment they are suffering. Yahweh keeps his promises.*”

So when we waver in our faithfulness...when we fail and sin again and again...let us take a lesson from our ancient forefathers and foremothers in faith. Let us fix our eyes on God and plead for his mercy. We are confident in that mercy because we know, “Yahweh keeps his promises.”

Living the Word...

The reading from Second Corinthians is one of my favorites. How often I have prayed as Paul does, asking God to remove those “thorns” of sin that seem to arise in me over and over again! I imagine the Israelites praying the same kind of prayer. And yet, the most powerful witness I can give is the peace I receive when I turn my gaze back to God and come to God for forgiveness and strength. In his recent exhortation, Pope Francis echoes Paul’s words: “*Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God’s grace.*” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*)

If you struggle to make amends for your sins, pray Psalm 123 and fix your eyes on the God who looks at you with love. Take inspiration from Paul, and realize it is through both your weakness and your desire to improve and grow that God’s mercy, compassion, and strength is revealed for others to see.

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Jul 9: *“Thus says the LORD: I will allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart... She shall call me ‘My husband...’”* (Hos 2: 16-18, 21-22)

The Book of Hosea, featured this week, is fairly short. In it, we see a very anthropomorphic God, a jealous lover that vacillates between anger and mercy, a passionate God that continues to love his bride, Israel, despite her infidelity. (It was Hosea that first introduced the concept of Israel as God’s spouse.) When I think of God in human terms, I of course think of Jesus, but I tend to think of God the Father as a patient parent, not a mercurial lover; a God of *agape* (selfless) and *pragma* (enduring) love, not one of *eros*. The image of a God who has a burning love and desire for us may feel a little uncomfortable to some, yet I believe God’s love is far beyond any human words or description. When you think of God’s love, imagine everything that is healthy and true of human love and multiply it until it is beyond your dreams. That is a good starting point!

Jul 10: *“When they sow the wind, they shall reap the whirlwind...”* (Hos 8:4-1, 11-13)

A powerful metaphor, one very appropriate for the state of the world these days, I’d say. If we sow falsehoods, things of no substance, fleeting propositions that we commit to today and renounce tomorrow, we will receive in return disruption, even destruction. It’s particularly important if there are whirlwinds swirling around you to keep anchored in prayer and good works. It takes patience and fortitude to avoid being swept away; it takes courage and God’s grace to fight against these ill winds. If you are feeling caught up by a whirlwind, seek shelter in God’s hands. Pray for the strength to remain centered and calm amidst the storm.

Jul 11: *“Break up for yourselves a new field, for it is time to seek the LORD...”* (Hos 10:1-3, 7-8, 12)

In this verse from Hosea, we hear God pleading for us to break up “a new field.” Maybe the field of your soul is overgrown with weeds or strewn with trash; maybe it is dry and barren. Whatever condition your field is in, turn to the Master Gardener who is eager to nurture the seed planted within you. It may take some hard work to break up the soil and clear a new path, but God is always by your side, sharing the yoke with you.

Jul 12: *Jesus said to his Apostles: “As you go, make this proclamation: ‘The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons.”* (Mt 10:7-15)

There’s no mention in the gospels as to how long the Apostles were away from Jesus as they went about Galilee with the message of God’s Kingdom. You get the impression it wasn’t an overnight trip. It talks about staying with people and being a laborer who earns his keep, so I’d guess maybe two or three weeks? Maybe longer? What was Jesus doing during that time? I like to think he took the time off to retreat, to pray, and to rest. I like to think Jesus gives us an example of self-care, to step back for a while and let others take the lead. Of course, the needs for help and healing don’t go away, so perhaps we can’t go off for a few weeks. But can we allow ourselves a few minutes--maybe an hour—every day to rest with Jesus? Remember, that’s exactly what he invites the disciples to do after they return! Jesus is inviting you and me as well.

Jul 13: *“Give me back the joy of your salvation, and a willing spirit sustain in me.”* (Ps 51)

Psalm 51 is a beautiful prayer of repentance, one we can pray after we’ve prayed Psalm 123 from Sunday, when we lift up our eyes to God. This psalm is attributed to David after his grave sins are pointed out to him by the prophet Nathan. I encourage you to read it slowly and sincerely, savoring the rich words of contrition, but also the willingness of the author to take responsibility for his actions. The “sincere heart” referenced in this psalm is the key to the “sacrifice of a broken spirit.” Go to God, heart in hand, and receive his mercy.

Jul 14: *“Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?”* (Is 6:1-8)

Who is the “us” God is referring to here? I guess you could say it’s a rhetorical question God asks on behalf of all the angels involved in this scene, but somehow I don’t think that’s it. I think ‘us’ is ‘us.’ And who is it that God shall send? *“Who shall ascend onto the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place? There is no one but us. There is no one to send, nor a clean hand, nor a pure heart on the face of the earth... but only us...and we ourselves unfit, not yet ready, having each of us chosen wrongly, made a false start, failed, yielded to impulse and the tangled comfort of pleasures, and grown exhausted...But there is no one but us. There never has been.”* (from *Holy the Firm* by Annie Dillard, 1998, Harper Perennial)