



Come and See!

September 23, 2018

The Word...

The wicked say: Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings...and charges us with violations of our training.
(from Wis 2:12, 17-20)

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

Beloved: Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist,
there is disorder and every foul practice.
(from Jas 3:16-4:3)

He began to ask (the disciples), "What were you arguing about on the way?"
They had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest.
(from Mk 9:30-37)

Pondering the Word...

The theme of today's readings can be summed up in one word: haughtiness. If I didn't know better, I might think I was reading today's news instead. 'Beset the just one....haughty and ruthless men....selfish ambition...who is the greatest?' And some people say Scripture is no longer relevant?!!

In the first reading, we learn about a "whistleblower," someone--a prophetic image of the Messiah perhaps--who is not afraid to call out hypocrisy and sin. It's obvious "groupthink" has overtaken the community and circling the wagons and closing ranks has become more important than the truth. Whistleblowers these days often get the same kind of treatment as does the unfortunate prophet we read about today.

We hear in the psalm, men can be ruthless, even when claiming to have God set before their eyes. They ignore the poor, refuse the refugee, and imprison the immigrant. James seems to see right into our world where jealousy and ambition cause disorder and dishonesty, leaving the masses disheartened and disgusted. "Trash talk" about who is the greatest...braggadocio that belittles and abases others seems to be the order of the day.

But wait...what does Jesus have to say? "*Anyone who wishes to be first shall be last of all and servant to all.*" The message is as radical today as it was 2,000 years ago, and yet, as true disciples, we are called to take radical stands against lies and hypocrisy; to peacefully stand up for and with the oppressed and forgotten; to be humble, to serve. This is hard work. Are we up for the task?

Living the Word...

I read a quote the other day that really spoke to me. It's attributed to the late Rev. Bill Arlow, an Irish priest who was worked for peaceful resolution during the Troubles in Northern Ireland: "*It is better to fail in a cause that will finally succeed than to succeed in a cause that will finally fail.*" This is so tough in a culture that idolizes monetary success and winning at all costs. It's much easier to be nice to the kid who's been bullied than to report the problem or confront the bullies; less risky to ignore graft than call attention to it; less time-consuming to give alms to the working poor than to lobby for just wages; more convenient to temporarily treat the symptom than try to eliminate the root cause. In reality, there are many things we can't solve, but that doesn't mean we should be silent. Use your voice today to raise the awareness of injustice in our midst.

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Sep 24: *"He (lives on your holy mountain) who walks blamelessly, does justice; who thinks the truth in his heart."* (Ps 15)
Somewhere in my memory, I recall being told by an adult in my life that I thought too much with my heart and not enough with my head. While age has tempered that somewhat, I still tend to put a lot of emphasis on my feelings. And that can be really good when my heart is unencumbered and free to love; and sometimes, it can be not so good, when my ego needs and agendas take hold. It is a noble goal to "think the truth in our hearts" — a goal we should strive for—but it requires us to face the truth about ourselves as well. As the author Anais Nin once wrote, *"We don't see things as they are; we see things as we are."* If we are really committed to thinking the truth with our hearts, i.e., thinking with compassion and love, then we are called to look at our expectations and definitions of truth. Do they align with Jesus' truth? Are his values our values?

Sep 25: *"He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will himself also call and not be heard."* (Prv 21:1-6, 10-13)
It's easy to avoid the cries of the poor and we don't even have to shut our ears. We just shut our doors. We lock the gates at the entrance to our enclave. Like the rich man who dined sumptuously while Lazarus starved (Lk 16:19-31), we are blissfully unaware of the poverty we don't allow ourselves to see. And at those rare times when we do see, we are quick to judge and to condemn. We can even miss the spiritual poverty of those closest to us; and sometimes, we don't even hear ourselves crying out, starving in the face of too much stuff and not enough substance. Consider this: perhaps the best way for you to finally hear the cries of others is to cry out yourself, to give up the façade, and to plead with God to open your door, your ears, your heart.

Sep 26: *"Every word of God is tested...Add nothing to his words."* (Prv 30:5-9)
When I think of the billions and billions of pages written "adding" to God's word—this rule, that dogma...that rite, this doctrine...I imagine the stack might just reach to heaven itself! God's word is pure; it has been tested and refined. God's Word is Jesus. And what does he tell us? Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. Any questions?

Sep 27: *"The eye is not satisfied with seeing nor is the ear satisfied with hearing."* (Eccl 1:2-11)
The Wisdom Books in the Old Testament (seven in the Catholic Bible; five in Protestant Bibles, with the other two in the Apocrypha) are really wonderful to read. We're probably familiar with the psalms (at least the ones in the lectionary) and perhaps with the Book of Job. And while some of what is recorded in the Wisdom books is said to be "morally imperfect," or applies only to the times in which they were written, there's an amazing amount of ageless wisdom as well. It is also amazing how much human nature has not changed. The author of Ecclesiastes reminds us in this verse that we often take for granted the incredible gifts we have. We "chase after the wind," in search of meaning and greater things when all we really need is to acknowledge and give thanks to God, the true source of all meaning. Consider taking a few weeks to slowly read through the Wisdom Books. Keep a journal to record those passages that share lessons for your life.

Sep 28: *"A time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away."* (Eccl 3:1-11)
Over the past few years, I've seen lots of books and programs about downsizing, I guess because we baby boomers are getting on in years. Many of us have things our parents' generation valued and passed down that are no longer valued or wanted by our children or grandchildren. But far more important than the keepsakes of the past are other things we tend to hold onto: grudges and hurts, failures and regrets. It's never too late (or too early for that matter) to cast away the emotional baggage that weighs us down and takes up so much room in our lives; to lose the chains of our egos and pride that keep us from forgiving and being forgiven. No matter what your age, there is a time to seek peace, a time to keep love alive in our hearts. That time is now.

Sep 29: *War broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels battled against the dragon...the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world, was thrown down to earth, and its angels were thrown down with it.* (Rv 12: 7-12)
The Book of Revelations is filled with frightening images and symbolic language typical of apocalyptic writing of the time. One small word from today's passage struck me. We hear the Devil and its angels were thrown down to *earth*. Not to hell, not into the lake of fire (that happens later), but to earth. Rather troubling when you think about it—until you recall that God came to earth as well. The presence of evil in our world is no match for the living, breathing presence of Jesus Christ.