

Homily

September 3, 2021

Colossians 1:15-20

Psalm 100

Luke 5: 33-39

St. Gregory the Great

Growing up in my family, I inherited from my Irish mother a spirit of melancholy and an undying nostalgia for memories of the past. I inherited from my French father a love for the early morning solitude and an undying hope for the day ahead.

Growing up in the community over the years gave me a more balanced notion of time in the past and in the future. Balanced because I recognize and treasure the past because it led us to where we are today. And balanced in my hope for the future because of the integration of how we are striving to live in the present.

I must admit, though, that my mother's nostalgia of wanting the past back with its simplicity and predictability often wins out in the face of our lives and our world today. Watching the news and the unending flashes of horror and tragedy across the world gives in to my melancholy.

I do wonder how the Bridegroom is really with us. Ought we not to be fasting all the time? I would say to Letitia O'Connell when we would often watch the news together: "How can these things keep happening? Why do people act like this? When will Justice win out?" She would listen and then say: "I know, but God is in this somehow." My impatient response of "Where? How? When?" never held weight with her faith.

Considering all this, what might we think of today in these readings?

Two things. The Gift of the Jews in their understanding of history.
And the Kingdom of God.

In the earliest religious thought, most cultures had a vision of the world and its time as cyclical. Seasons repeat endlessly. Nature and life die and is reborn into new life. Cyclical... repetition. My mother always said that there is nothing new under the sun. (I wonder if she knew she was quoting scripture: Ecclesiastes 1:9)

It was the Jewish people who saw things differently and in fact changed the way everyone thinks and feels. Because they were the first people to break out of the repetitious cycle to look at history in a new way.

Their worldview was linear, that is, history is progressively reaching toward fulfillment. This was a complete departure from the old notion of Ecclesiastes. It held a dream of something new, something yet to happen, a future, a destiny.

Beginning with Abraham, the people based their lives on a promise that would be realized in fulfillment.

We take all of this for granted...this linear world view.

Our familiarity with the universe story and our celebration of its Morning prayer this week found us marching right along. Through the marvels of creation evolving over billions of years, with the gift of our lives and the wonder of what consciousness means, the wide world of interiority, aspirations, relationality, ...we cannot count the gifts that will continue to evolve.

Most importantly as Christians we recognize in this long line, that watershed moment of the supreme gift of God.... God's gift of self in the person of Jesus who entered our history and with his life, death, and new life showed us how to bring creation to a new moment.

The letter to the Colossians says, "all the fullness of God dwells in him."

The desire of God in this linear history is to bring all creation to fullness, to unity. We believe that a plan has always existed in the mind of God, the aim of which is to bring us to the full enjoyment of God.

We have a name for this plan: The Kingdom of God

The encounter in today's Gospel puts a spotlight on this plan.

Two groups: The Scribes, the Pharisees and Jesus with his disciples.

Both groups had a vision of history inherited from their Jewish ancestry. The Kingdom of God was a deeply rooted theme.

Certainly, it was central to Jesus' life and ministry.

The people of the old Covenant had hopes and an unshakable confidence that God would vindicate them and bestow on them the blessings of peace, prosperity, and fullness of life. Someday. God would be faithful. God would draw near to all creation and establish a new world of mercy and justice. Someday...

Jesus shared all these longings. It was the way he understood his vocation and ministry. But he gave a different emphasis: It was that the Kingdom of God is an imminent reality. It is here, among us, in us. Everything that Jesus said and did was evidence that the Kingdom of God was breaking into the world. His acts of healing, compassion, words of wisdom were all directed toward creating the kind of life that realizes the plan of God even now.

The stunning lesson is that God is drawing near, even now. The history continues in us, in all of creation, and we, in our fidelity to life, bring about the Kingdom that much more today than we did yesterday. We march along in the Light of Christ with acts of healing, compassion, words of wisdom and celebrating all the marvelous gifts of life.

The story goes on...it is not finished.

We pray each day: "Your Kingdom come."

What will that Kingdom be like?

We can be sure of one thing. God is in this.

Fasting or feasting, troubles or peace, we cling to this sure hope.

We look forward. Probably that is why we can't patch something old with something new.