

Daily Prayer

Feria

Wednesday, October 14, 2020

We enter into a time of quiet. We offer to God our selves and in the silence know that God embraces us as God's very own. We offer to God our hopes and our concerns through our prayers and in the silence listen for God. Today we hold in our prayers the ordinary moments in life—the trials and the joys.

We begin by saying

Shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life.

See Philippians 2.15, 16

The First Reading

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Galatians 5.16-25

The Psalm

Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of
the wicked, *
nor lingered in the way of sinners,
nor sat in the seats of the scornful!

Their delight is in the law of the Lord, *
and they meditate on his law day and night.

They are like trees planted by streams of water,
bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither; *
everything they do shall prosper.

It is not so with the wicked; *
they are like chaff which the wind blows away.

Therefore the wicked shall not stand upright when
judgement comes, *
nor the sinner in the council of the righteous.

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, *
but the way of the wicked is doomed.

Psalm 1

The Gospel Reading

‘But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds, and neglect justice and the love of God; it is these you ought to have practised, without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love to have the seat of honour in the synagogues and to be greeted with respect in the market-places. Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without realizing it.’

One of the lawyers answered him, ‘Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us too.’ And he said, ‘Woe also to you lawyers! For

you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not lift a finger to ease them.

Luke 11.42-46

We continue with the reflection that follows. In silence, we ask what the reading has to say to us today. Is there something in the reflection that draws us more deeply into the reading? What does God have to say to us? What do we have to ask God?

The Reflection

Paul MacLean

Reading the words of St Paul and reflecting on the news, especially political, leads us to think we could all do with a bit more of the fruits of the Spirit ('love, joy, peace, patience ...'), and a little less of the works of the Flesh ('idolatry, enmities, strife, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions ...').

At first reading these two lists seem to be mostly about personal behaviour, but Michelle Obama has said that what she learned most from her time being married to the president was how much personal character formed prior to election shaped political action and policy afterwards. This is perhaps a point not appreciated by the myriad of Christian supporters of the present president of the United States.

So, this passage has reverberations far beyond the personal behaviour of individuals. Integrity counts in public life and affects both populations and foreign policy.

But what has bedevilled Christians mostly is the contrast Paul seems to make between the Flesh and the Spirit, that all fine things in life are a gift of the Spirit, while all the clearly destructive behaviours have their origins in the Flesh, which we often interpret as our body and its desires. Does Paul really think that our body is evil? This view has led to much abnegation in Christian history, from ancient ascetics escaping to the desert to deny their bodily passions, to modern day preachers who harp on the evils of the flesh yet

themselves succumb to destructive temptations of money and sex with their congregants.

Richard Rohr offers some good advice on this conundrum, writing that the best modern equivalent of 'flesh' in St Paul is not 'body' but 'ego'.

Indeed, if we look at that first list (a common list of depravities known well in Stoic literature) we will see that they are all focussed on the satisfaction of individual desire, and desire that is rooted in an individual ego that 'can't get enough.' When they do involve others, such as 'strife, quarrels, envy' etc. it's all about denigrating another person for one's own satisfaction or aggrandizement. By contrast the items in the second list all seem to include concern for other people, even though the 'fruits of the Spirit' reside in the individual Christian. You aren't just 'patient'; you are patient with another person, perhaps a particularly annoying one.

Rohr goes on to say, 'So what Paul means by "flesh" is the trapped self, the small self, the partial self, or what Thomas Merton called the false self. Basically, *spirit* is the whole self, the Christ Self, the True Self "hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3) that we fall into by grace. *The problem is not between body and spirit; it's between part and whole.*'

I think that the key to this well known passage, in fact to Paul's theology with its dramatic contrasts, and also to our own spiritual journey and struggles, is in that last verse, 'If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.'

A new life-giving spirit has been released with the death and resurrection of Jesus, one that overcomes the dehumanizing, limiting, self-centred effects of our voracious egos with self-sacrificial love. It's this love that gives us real life - we are made alive, more fully human, by the Spirit. We become whole, and holy.

Paul was writing primarily for new Christian communities in Galatia, and so too it's been my experience that it's not always easy to practice on my own all the items in the second list, in fact it's all but impossible. Being in community and seeing the example of fellow Christians has usually provided the necessary corrective and encouragement.

In these times when it's all too easy to succumb to those feelings of anger and despair as we observe a world driven to chaos by needy and destructive egos run rampant, let's remember there is a second list, one that is life-giving. Let's live by the Spirit and together practice those things that will produce fruit for the world and all God's people in it.

When the time is right, we conclude our time of silence with the canticle

The Canticle ~ Song of Peace

Come, let us go up to the mountain of God, ♦
to the house of the God of Jacob;

That God may teach us his ways, ♦
and that we may walk in his paths.

For the law shall go out from Zion, ♦
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

God shall judge between the nations, ♦
and shall mediate for many peoples.

They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, ♦
and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, ♦
neither shall they learn war any more.

O people of Jacob, come: ♦
let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Isaiah 2.3-5

We continue in prayer for those people and situations that we hold up before God (The Intercessions) and continue with the concluding collect, the Lord's prayer and the closing sentences.

The Intercessions

Let us pray to the Lord,
who is our refuge and stronghold.

For the health and well-being of our nation,
that all who are fearful and anxious
may be at peace and free from worry:

Lord, hear us,

Lord, graciously hear us.

For the isolated and housebound,
that we may be alert to their needs,
and care for them in their vulnerability:

Lord, hear us,

Lord, graciously hear us.

For our homes and families,
our schools and young people,
and all in any kind of need or distress:

Lord, hear us,

Lord, graciously hear us.

For a blessing on our local community,
that our neighbourhoods may be places of trust and friendship,
where all are known and cared for:

Lord, hear us,

Lord, graciously hear us.

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,
to the mercy and protection of God.

Merciful Father,

accept these prayers

**for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

We conclude our prayers

Almighty God,
in our baptism you adopted us for your own.
Quicken, we pray, your Spirit within us,
that we, being renewed both in body and mind,
may worship you in sincerity and truth;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

[let us pray as our Saviour taught us,]

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen

We conclude

May God bless the work of our hands.
Amen.

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