

Homily - October 3, 2020

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We celebrate God who is alive and active in our world, while we experience many scenes of contrast at the same time—tragedy, evil and awful stuff happening. God's word today can help us be people of hope in such a situation of contrast. Yet we know that we sometimes are pessimistic or even take pleasure in hearing and talking about all the negative stuff. So, we call out to our compassionate God. Lord have mercy!

Job's wonderful story ended not as an Old Testament prosperity story, per se, but as a story of how God works when people go through the worst moments of their life while still maintaining personal contact with God, even when that contact may be filled with Job-like anguish, anger and despair. What at one moment seems to be utter tragedy can eventually turn into incredible goodness. Job finally recognized and saw God in truer fashion, even though he could not understand all that was happening. He became humbler.

In the Gospel, we see Jesus guiding his seventy-two missionary disciples to a similar kind of humility, "Do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you but rejoice because your names are written in heaven." Names for the Hebrew culture had much more significance, even to the point of being serious or substantial representations of a person. With that understanding, Jesus was saying, "You [disciples] have been invited/written by God to partake in God's saving dynamic of bringing about heaven [on earth] through your missionary work."

A further interpretation of "your names were written in heaven" is that these disciples finally would be "written into/taken into heaven of the afterlife." All this Jesus said so that the disciples would not take ultimate credit for their role in conquering evil in the world—evicting demons and curing illnesses, etc. Jesus' wise call for a humble stance is not just for his initial Christian missionaries, but for missionaries of all times. Commentators tell us that this commissioning of 72 disciples really is a biblical symbol of the wider global mission which occurred in the post-resurrection era.

Jesus presents us with yet another huge challenge by saying, "Blessed are your eyes for seeing what many prophets and kings desired to see but did not see." Job was finally able to see God's hand at work through all the tragedy of his life. The first disciples of post-resurrection could see evil being conquered when at the same time some of them were being martyred and chased down. We are living in a world where Christianity is in major crisis

with many people leaving churches and/or not seeing the relevance of believing in God—all this, as a pandemic is ramping up once again.

We must let Jesus ask us whether we are seeing the wonders of God at this moment filled with crises? Do we see God's hand in medical personnel making huge efforts and sacrifices to find medicines and effective therapies for COVID-19? Yesterday, with lots of enthusiasm, my sister told me about a major medicine breakthrough for people suffering ALS and a related disease which she too suffers. Do we see God's hand in the courageous and difficult struggle of people helping our nation understand that systemic racism still exists? Do we see God's hand in the difficult struggle of reducing gun violence as gun sales rise, especially during these recent months?

Jesus told his disciples and us, "Rejoice because your names are written in heaven." Are you and I aware of how God has "written your/my name in heaven"—written/invited you and me into his work of achieving heaven on earth NOW? Until we can concretely answer this manifold question, we will most likely not be people of hope for our suffering sisters and brothers.