

Homily, of Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A

Zephaniah prophesied in Israel about 640 – 609 BC during the reign of Josiah. At that time, there was wide spread of infidelity to God. There was wide spread of the worship of other gods by the people. There was also so much injustice in the land. When people move away from God, they move away from justice. That was why in the first reading the prophet encouraged the people to seek the Lord, to seek justice, to seek humility, and to seek righteousness.

In the second reading, some Christian converts of Corinth were obviously behaving in ways that made St. Paul to write to them in order to correct them. Some of them had forgotten their humble beginning. They were arrogant and proud of their gifts, as if it's by their own power. St. Paul warned them, "Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord." In other words, St. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to be humble in all things. In 1 Corinthians 4:7, St. Paul asked, "What do you possess that you have not received? But if you have received it, why are you boasting as if you did not receive it." There is no doubt that St. Paul is speaking to some of us right here.

The Gospel reading on the beatitudes reminds me of what Jesus says in Mk 16:17, "These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages." What I see in the Gospel are new languages Jesus wants his followers to speak. Jesus wants us to speak the languages verbally and to speak the languages by our actions. As we have read, the new languages are signs that we have the Spirit of Jesus in us.

Poor in spirit is not about material poverty. There are many who are materially poor but are not poor in spirit, and there are those who are materially rich but are poor in spirit. Poor in spirit means to be humble no matter what I am. The humility should show in my words and actions.

Those who mourn are those who mourn over evil and who try to do whatever they can to eliminate it. Think of the work of Missionaries, charity organizations, justice and peace groups, law enforcement agencies, doctors and engineers without borders, etc. Some of these people sacrifice their life, time, talent, material, not only to provide charity to the underprivileged and the suffering but also work to eliminate evil in our world. Another way of mourning over evil is to experience sorrow and regret over one's sins and repent from them.

The meek are those who hold God's will over and above theirs. They allow themselves to be God-controlled, not self-willed controlled. They are submissive and surrendering like Mary who said to the angel, "Let it be done to me according to your words" (Luke 1:38). They take to heart the words of Jesus, "Not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39); "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me" (John 4:34). The meek do not control or bully others. They are not self-opinionated. They have listening ears. Most importantly, they listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in their hearts.

Other beatitudes are righteousness, mercy, clean of heart, and peacemakers. A person's spirituality is hollow if it lacks any of these beatitudes. Can anyone talk of an authentic spirituality without hunger for righteousness (uprightness)? Or letting mercy rule one's actions? Or clean of heart, which is letting good intention guide one's actions? Or being peaceful and promoting peace? These are the new languages which are signs that accompany followers of Jesus. The summary of the Gospel of today is keep being good and doing good. We read in the Bible, "Tell the righteous it shall be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds" (Isaiah 3:10).

Also the Bible makes it clear that there will be persecution, opposition and criticism for those who stand up for righteousness. Sirach 2:1 says, "My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trial." The persecution, opposition and criticism can be experienced anywhere: in the family, in the work place, in the community, in the church, or in the country. It can even be in form of unchristian policies. At such times of trial we are encouraged to stand firm and not lose faith. Sirach 2:6 says, "Trust in God and he will help you, make your ways straight and hope in him." Remember, it shall be well with the righteous.

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