

Homily of Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A, 2023

Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-13; Psalm 146:6-10; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; Matthew 5:1-12

Zephaniah prophesied when the worship of the true God was abandoned by most of the people in Israel. The section we have read in the first reading is Zephaniah's prophecy to encourage the faithful "remnant of Israel" not to lose faith but to continue to observe God's law and take refuge in God. Zephaniah said to them, "Seek the Lord... seek justice, seek humility... speak no lies." If they remained faithful, they would "be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger."

Our situation is not different from the situation when Zephaniah prophesied in Israel. Many people have abandoned the worship of the true God. To us, the "remnant" faithful, who still worship the true God, today's reading encourages us not to lose our faith but continue to seek the Lord and take refuge in him. We are encouraged to continue to live the life of justice, humility, and integrity. Those who remained faithful will be sheltered by God.

In today's gospel, Jesus assures us that there is reward on earth and in eternal life for a life of righteousness. Isaiah prophesies, "Tell the righteous it shall be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds" (Isaiah 3:10).

Those who are poor in spirit and those who are meek are those who humble themselves before God and before human beings. Those who humble themselves before God attribute all they have as given to them by God. They focus on God and not on themselves; and they accept God's will. Those who humble themselves before human beings are free from pride and arrogance. They have respectful behavior towards others. They are not self-opinionated.

Those who are poor in spirit and humble of heart grow in other virtues. St. Alphonsus Liguori is referenced as saying that the saints regard humility as the basis and guardian of all virtues. St. Teresa of Calcutta calls humility the mother of all virtues.

It is not only during his Sermon on the Mount that Jesus promises rewards to those who are poor in spirit and those who are humble of heart. In Matthew 11:29 Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves." Jesus removes agitation and tension from the meek and humble, and grants them rest and refreshment.

Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." St. James reminds us, "For the judgment is merciless to one who has not shown mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13).

Those who are clean of heart have no dishonesty in them. They have a forgiving heart, and they are peace makers. They are men and women of sincerity of heart, intention, and purpose.

Those who mourn and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (justice) are those who grieve over evil and seek ways to get rid of it. Such people must not be discouraged by the insult, slander, and the persecution they face from evil minded people.

Anyone who wants to seek the Lord, or seek humility, or seek justice, or seek mercy, or seek peace, and or seek integrity must be ready for the insult, slander, and persecution that will surely come his or her way. St. Paul calls these constraints "weapons of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 6:7).

Lastly, St. Paul advises us in the second reading, "Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31). In 1 Corinthians 4:7, St. Paul questions us, "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?" St. James cautions us, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers and sisters: all good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights ..."

Let us pray:

O Lord, grant us the courage to seek you,
And the courage to seek humility, justice, mercy, peace, and integrity.
Grant us the perseverance to conquer the constraints that come our way.
In our victory, may we boast in you, and not in ourselves,
And always realize that all we have are a gift from you,
And that they are for God's glory.
Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP