

Homily For Tuesday of the 16th Week of Ordinary Time- Year II

St Peter's 8:30 AM Mass – July 21, 2020

Micah 7:14-20 "Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity, delighting in clemency, faithful to Jacob."

Psalm 85:1-7 "Restore us, O God of our salvation, so that your people may rejoice in you."

Matt 12:46-50 "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

(Optional Memorial of St. Lawrence of Brindisi, priest and Doctor)

God's Anger Or Divine Mercy

Introduction

As Christians, we sometimes get challenged with the question: How come your God is always angry and seeking vengeance? The one questioning us is asking: Why would you worship a God like that? Wouldn't it be better to trust only in people, who are real and you can see; or in science, which proves everything you need to know; or in yourself, and just be happy doing your own thing? Wouldn't that be better than having to account for a God who is watching every move you make to punish you for stepping out of line?

I worked with someone who used to say, when things weren't going well for him: God is smiting me. His life was like trying to avoid being struck by lightning that God would be aiming at him.

When we look at Sacred Scripture, we do regularly see reference to God who was angry, who is angry, or who will be angry. So, this is something we must address and be clear about, for the sake of our own faith, and for the sake of others.

I think you know that younger children always see their parents as simply angry when they have been disciplined for misbehaving. They don't see being corrected as being for their benefit until much later when they look back. In the same way, the petulant children of God also see him as angry, when it is they who have turned from him and disobeyed the commandments, which are there for their good.

Psalm

Perhaps this is how the psalmist was feeling. Knowing that God would be justified in punishing his sinful children, the psalmist today simply asks: "O Lord, will you be angry with us forever?" But, because he is also remembering what God has done in the past for his people, the psalmist pleads: "Lord, show us your mercy and love. Lord, you restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people. You pardoned all their sin. You withdrew all your wrath. Now will you do the same for us? Restore us again, O God of our salvation, so that your people may rejoice in you?"

Could we have better words to put into our own mouths today when it seems like everywhere are signs of God being angry with us? You have forgiven your people before. Will you do it again for us? Do we doubt that this is not a time to pretend everything is fine and that we are right with God? I hope not. I really do hope not.

Micah

As with us now, the prophet Micah had bad news for the people of Judah because of their many sins. But, in chapter seven, it's good news. Who is like you, O God, who does **not** retain his anger forever. He has compassion and delights in showing clemency." To be granted clemency means to be shown mercy or leniency. Those who grant it have the power to pardon a criminal sentence. We deserve the punishment for our sins. But, "He will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."

Matthew

We don't see it in today's gospel passage, but at this moment, Jesus was angry at constant challenges to his obvious divine authority expressed in mercy to sinners and those who are sick or injured.

Jesus pointed to the disciples, saying: There is no advantage in the kingdom to being biologically related to Jesus. Even science tells us that we are all related as members of the human family. But that membership will not save us from our sins. That will happen only by doing the will of God. Jesus is pretty clear:

"Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Call To Action

Has there been a time of greater need for mercy? It is the nature of sin that it leads to discord and from there to violence. We need to repent. Chastisement is not God acting out in anger.

God is not the God of punishment but the God of mercy, the God of clemency, the God of forgiveness, the God who tramples our sins underfoot, the God who throws our sins into the sea. The sea is the place of disorder and chaos. Where there is chaos, sin reigns. We are not going to bring order by getting rid of our police, but by turning to the God of order.

Let us answer the question of God's vengeance with this passage from the book of Judith: "Not for vengeance did the Lord put them in the crucible to try their hearts, nor has he done so with us. It is by way of admonition that he chastises those who are close to him." (Judith 8:25-27)

Today's saint feast is for Lawrence of Brindisi. He describes God: "The word of God is a light to the mind and a fire to the will. Against the hardness of a heart that persists in wrongdoing, the Word acts as a hammer. Against the world, the flesh and the devil it serves as a sword that destroys all sin."

God is not the God of anger but of mercy. Let us today turn from our sins and be like Jesus' mother, who fits all criteria for what it means to be a faithful disciple. She is not only the natural mother of Jesus but also the preeminent member of his family of disciples. Let us be true children of the merciful God of salvation.