

Homily for August 19, 2020

Wednesday, 20th Week Ordinary Time

Divine Economics

I've entitled this homily "Divine Economics" because this seems to be a theme at play in our readings this morning. In the passage we heard from Ezekiel God is grieved by those who are shepherds of the people of Israel, but they are leaders devoid of mercy, gentleness and grace. The characteristic attitude is expressed with this indictment against them:

with force and harshness you have ruled them.

The Lord is so grieved by the self-serving practise of these leaders that he states that rather than tending the flock entrusted to them they:

eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep.¹

In other words rather than caring for the sheep under their pastoral charge they consume them for their own satisfaction and pleasure. Consequently, Ezekiel says repeatedly that the sheep will be scattered, Listen to the repeated use of the verb "scattered"

⁵ So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and scattered, they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep were scattered, they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill; my sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with no one to search or seek for them²

When the shepherds use the office entrusted to them by the Lord in an abusive way there is one kind of divine economics, that I will call retribution, where they will get what they deserve. This is where God will bring judgment again such shepherds and hold them accountable for their abuse of the sheep:

Thus says the Lord GOD, I am against the shepherds; and I will demand my sheep at their hand, and put a stop to their feeding the sheep; no longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, so that they may not be food for them.³

What a contrast between the shepherd of Ezekiel 34 and the shepherd Jesus, who tells the story of the workers in the vineyard. Here is the other kind of divine economics – the generosity of grace – where we don't get what we deserve. With this kind of economics all are invited to

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Eze 34:3). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Eze 34:6). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Eze 34:10). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

discover to live our lives when lived in accord with the rhythm of Jesus' life. When this happens we have a shared realization how much we need to appropriate the Gift of God's love that is available to all who desire it. I read a reflection on this passage where the writer remembers working hard in his garden throughout the spring and summer, only to discover that the most productive part of the garden was a surprise patch of pumpkins and zucchini he never knowingly planted. They were apparently the result of some seeds included in the compost that haphazardly spread on the ground in early spring. It was a reminder that, in spite of all our hard work, so much of what comes our way in life has the quality of gift about it. We do not create it; it far exceeds our expectations.

If our primary concern in life is limited to matters of fairness, we will frequently be disappointed. If we overlook the mystery in life and need to have things neatly explained, gratitude and graciousness will be edged out of our lives and we will become hardened like those religious leaders of Ezekiel's time. Writes Robinson,

"When our only measure is fairness, when our preoccupation is our just desserts, we lose touch with a sense of grace and graciousness. We forget about the wild zucchinis, the people who love us more than we deserve, and the God who extends generosity and forgiveness to us."

This is the divine economics that is on offer with Jesus, where we are learning to live recognizing that each and every one of us needs the ministry of the kind hearted, tender shepherd. Communities who understand this kind of grace-filled arithmetic will be gatherings of patient care where to turn around the indictment of Ezekiel:

The weak are strengthened, the sick are healed, the injured are bound up, the stray are gathered and the lost are found.

It is my prayer for St. Peter's that we will grow in our conversion to be a living example of Jesus' parable so that here people will always know their pastor's tender care and discover what it is find the wild zucchinis and pumpkins of God infinite grace.