

Homily for December 15, 2017

Psalm 1 is like an overture. It introduces the Book of Psalms much in the way an overture introduces the themes that will then be later developed in the opera.

This psalm overture introduces four themes that are repeated throughout the Psalter.

- Desire God's Blessing
- Be discerning about the Company you keep
- Study God's Word
- Stand for what is right

Psalm 1 begins with "Blessed is the man". What is God's blessing? It is to know God's favour. This is God's desire for us. The reading from Isaiah expresses God's blessing this way:

***Thus says the LORD,
your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
"I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit,
who leads you in the way you should go.***

The first thing mentioned is that God is our redeemer. To be redeemed is to be bought back. In the ancient world it was often used in relation to someone who had been redeemed from a life of slavery. God had redeemed Israel from the slavery of Egypt and Jesus has redeemed us from the slavery of sin. That is a life centred on ourselves unaware or uninterested in God. He is also called the Holy One of Israel. The word Holy means to be set apart and so to be honoured and revered. This redeeming and holy God wants to both guide us and profit us so that our lives can have direction and deep and lasting meaning. This is what it means to know God's blessing.

But here is the thing about living in this world. No sooner do we hear words that speak of God's desire for us to know his blessing then other voices enter the conversation.

***Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;***

Notice the verbs here: "walks not, nor stands, nor sits". The person who desires to live under God blessing will be discerning in the company they keep. For he or she knows there are always those whose counsel is wicked, whose lives are absorbed with themselves and are skeptical and dismissive of God.

How hard it can be to not be influenced by bad company.

In today's Gospel we realize that even when the holy one of Israel was present in the world in the person of Jesus Christ, there were those who ridiculed both John the Baptist and him. They were like little children taunting Jesus and John the Baptist in the school yard. But Jesus says to us through this psalm, having nothing to do with those childish voices. Rather the man or woman that is blessed will delight in the law of God and meditate on his law day and night."

How do we counter the naysayers? Through a life-long study and applying to our lives the teaching of Holy Scripture. Such a man or woman will be like a tree planted by streams of water that will yield their fruit in due season. In other words people whose lives are orientated towards God will walk, stand and sit in the counsel of the wise, those we call the saints. It is because their lives so clearly witness to God's blessing that throughout the year we recall the Saints of the Church. They inspire us to not be distracted but centred so we can live in such a way that we too will stand for what is right. These right deeds are what the psalm describes as the seasonal fruits that ripen on those trees that are blessed.

Notice how in the psalm the righteous person not only bears fruit but he or she also prospers. This means that they can become what God desires for us and thereby profit from God's blessing. People who invest well financially will often profit from those investments. Those who invest well spiritually will also profit from such an investment and what a different end from those who are did not invest their lives in God:

*In all that he does, he prospers.
4 The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff which the wind drives away.
for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.*

The overture to the Book of Psalms announces themes of such importance that they are to be considered each day of our lives.

- Desire God's Blessing
- Be discerning about the Company you keep
- Study God's Word
- Stand for what is right

May our lives resound with the notes of those who know such blessing so that we can be like an overture, introducing in this life those themes that will be fully developed when we by grace and good works enter into the fullness of God's blessing in heavenly glory!