

Homily for December 22, 2016

Chippie the parakeet never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage. The next he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over.

The problems began when Chippie's owner decided to clean Chippie's cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and she turned to pick it up. She'd barely said "hello" when "ssssopp!" Chippie got sucked in.

The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the bag. There was Chippie still alive, but stunned.

Since the bird was covered with dust and soot, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held Chippie under the running water. Then, realizing that Chippie was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do . . . she reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air.

Poor Chippie never knew what hit him.

A few days after the trauma, the reporter who'd initially written about the event contacted Chippie's owner to see how the bird was recovering. "Well," she replied, "Chippie doesn't sing much anymore he just sits and stares."

It's hard not to see why. Sucked in, washed up, and blown over . . . That's enough to steal the song from the stoutest heart.

There are times in life when we can feel like poor Chippie. The events of life overtake us to the point that we just don't feel like singing. If there is anyone whose life could have been like that of Chippie, it is our blessed Lady. Sucked into the demand of Caesar's census, she and Joseph had to travel days from the north of Israel to Bethlehem in the south to find no vacancy signs everywhere. Washed up in the violent tsunami of Herod's jealousy she and Joseph had to flee with Jesus to Egypt. Blown over by that violent mob demanding her son's crucifixion she was experiencing the full effects of the words Simeon prophesied when Jesus was eight days old. "A sword will pierce your own soul too". If there is anyone from whom the song should have been stolen it was Mary.

And yet her longest statement in the Gospels is in fact a song. That song that has probably been set to music more than any other, the song we call the Magnificat. The theme of this song allowed Mary to keep singing because Caesar's politics, Herod's megalomania and the crowd's hysterics did not define Mary's life.

She was able to keep singing because she knew God's purpose, God's values and God's justice are the golden melody that cannot be silenced.

The first part of her song celebrates God's purpose. Through her God will do mighty things and that all subsequent generations will call her blessed. We can look back all of these centuries later and realize that not only has her song been set to music countless times but her image has been captured more often in painting, sculpture, iconography than any other women. She is the most blessed of all woman.

The second part of her song celebrates God's values. Whereas tyrants like Herod live by the idea "might makes right", God's values declare:

***He has shown strength with his arm,
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,
52 he has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and exalted those of low degree;***

How many times do those who have lived by domineering others had their own lives end in despair and meaninglessness. Herod was so aware of his own unpopularity that he was determined that his death should be met with national mourning rather than rejoicing. In a scheme to achieve that goal, he arrested Judea's leading citizens and ordered that they all be executed when his own death was announced. The order was never carried out.

Here we are over two thousand years later marking the birth of him who so emptied himself of power that he showed that it is indeed those who learn the way of true humility who are in the end exalted.

In the third part of her song Mary celebrates God's justice.

***54 He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
55 as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his posterity for ever."***

In the Old Testament book of Isaiah there are four other songs, called the Servant Songs. All of them find their fulfillment in Jesus who is the true servant Israel. In Jesus we see the full outworking of the justice of God that takes the violence of the Cross and turns it into the means for our redemption. Because here we see on full display the mercy of God. Such mercy was promised 2000 years before Jesus to Abraham to whom God foretold that from him, all the peoples of the earth would be blessed.

So remember that when you are feeling sucked in by political maneuvering God's purpose are above politics. When you feel the swamped by a world that still declares "might makes right", God's values of the humble path have stood the test of millennia. When you feel blown over by the crowd's hysterics that so often want to silence God, his justice is eternal and can never be blown away.