

Homily for July 21, 2018

Over the past week our daily Old Testament Mass readings have been from Isaiah. Today our Old Testament reading shifts from Isaiah to Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah whose concern is with the exploitative attitudes and actions of the rich. Here are detailed:

1. The evil machinations of the wealthy.
2. God's reaction to their evil doings
3. The consequence that will result from God's judgement.

Evil Machinations:

*Alas for those who devise wickedness
and evil deeds on their beds!
When the morning dawns, they perform it,
because it is in their power.
² They covet fields, and seize them;
houses, and take them away;
they oppress householder and house.
people and their inheritance.¹*

These people are planning, plotting and carrying out their evil intentions. Evil acts begin with evil thoughts. Two words for sin are used: "wickedness" and "evil." "Wickedness" here refers to abuse of power in illegal and unethical machinations, resulting in social injustice. "Evil" refers to things that are abominable in God's eyes²

The wealthy oppressors were so filled with greed that they were plotting their next move even before they got out of bed in the morning. As soon as daylight came, they carried out their evil plans to increase their riches at the expense of the poor by illegally expropriating their land and homes. They could do it because they controlled the power structures of their society, believing that "might makes right." The very ease with which they did what was wrong shows how evil their manipulations were.

Money was their God, the more they had the more they wanted. How contrary to how the Lord would desire for the wealthy to use their resources. Proverbs 3:27 provides a better use of power:

"Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act."³

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mic 2:1–2). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

² Barker, K. L. (1999). [*Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*](#) (Vol. 20, p. 63). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

³ Barker, K. L. (1999). [*Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*](#) (Vol. 20, p. 63). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Power is to be used in the service of the good and when it is not, there will be consequences as God's reaction to their abuse will describe.

***Therefore thus says the Lord:
Now, I am devising against this family an evil
from which you cannot remove your necks;
and you shall not walk haughtily,
for it will be an evil time.***

Notice the repetition of the word devise. Verse one read of the wealthy: "***Alas for those who devise wickedness***". In verse 3 we read: "Now I am devising against this family an evil".

Those "who do harm will experience harm." The disaster probably was the Assyrian captivity of 722–721 B.C. and perhaps the Assyrian invasion of 701. From this they would not be able to extricate themselves (lit. "from which you cannot remove your necks"). The Assyrian yoke of exile would be like a heavy ox yoke on them. They who will not bend to God's 'easy yoke' (Matt. 11:29, 30) shall feel His iron yoke." Then they will no longer walk in proud defiance of God and his laws. Rather they will be subject to a taunt song:

***On that day they shall take up a taunt song against you,
and wail with bitter lamentation,
and say, "We are utterly ruined;
the Lord alters the inheritance of my people;
how he removes it from me!"⁴***

This results in the consequence of God's judgement detailed in our last verse:

***Therefore you will have no one to cast the line by lot in the assembly of the Lord.*⁵**

The lands confiscated by the enemy would never be restored to those land barons. Land redistribution was the essential aspect of the year of Jubilee every fifty years. The point here is that certain families would have no representative left to stake their claim in any future land redistribution. This is what is meant by "no one to cast the lot". Lacking land ownership these families would have no legal standing in "the congregation of Yahweh," i.e. the covenant community⁶.

As I was studying this text and trying to understand it I was also thinking what is its application? It struck me that I have had conversations with parishioners who have come from other parts of

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mic 2:3–4). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mic 2:5). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁶ Smith, J. E. (1994). [*The Minor Prophets*](#) (Mic 2:3–5). Joplin, MO: College Press.

the world where the evil described here has been their experience. Governments and power structures that oppressed them that led them to re-establish themselves in Calgary. These brothers and sisters have experienced a form of evil that is so prevalent in the world be it Judah in the late 700s or places like Venezuela in 2018.

How common in this form of exploitation and how thankful we are for living in a country where the due process of law and the respect for property rights makes Canada a country of refuge for those who come to our land.