

Homily for June 5, 2021

“What Jesus notices”

In today’s Gospel we read about the poor widow who gave her all to the Lord. Her simple generosity, her offering her whole livelihood, was a response to God’s unconditional love. God’s love comes first. When we get this wrong, everything else in the spiritual life is thrown off kilter. This is what we see with the example of the Scribes. They are extremely religious, but theirs is a practise that is self-serving. This modern translation of this passage captures their attitude accurately:

“Watch out for the religion scholars. They love to walk around in academic gowns, preening in the radiance of public flattery, basking in prominent positions, sitting at the head table at every church function. And all the time they are exploiting the weak and helpless.”

Religion can be the greatest influence for good when it is used as a response to the love of God, as it was in the case of the widow, But, when it is used to gain human respect, as was the case of the scribes, it becomes an evil influence.

Listen to how St. John expresses this predilection: “In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as the expiation of our sins.”

If we play the game of loving God in order to get God to love us or to win the favour of others, then we are lost. If we think that we can earn salvation or we can work our way into God’s heart, then we are lost. Here’s a good way to think about it: we wouldn’t exist were it not for God’s love. God needs nothing; therefore whatever exists outside of God exists because God desires some good for it. Love precedes, therefore, our intelligence, our courage, our wills, our designs and purposes, indeed our very existence.

All this week we have been reading from the Book of Tobit. In today’s reading we discover that Tobit’s life, his wife Anna’s, son Tobias’ and his wife Sarah have lived for decades like the woman who gave her all to the Temple treasury. Thinking that the man who had been accompanying Tobias was just that, a man, Tobit wanted to insure he would be fairly compensated for the work he has done. It is at this moment, the man reveals himself to be not Azariah but the Angel Raphael.

He states clearly that our response to God is the result of God’s goodness and love towards us.

What is it that Raphael highlights?

With fitting honor declare to all people the deeds of God.

It is this we see expressed in the life of this family. Through great hardships they continued to honour God and lived compassionately in relation to their neighbours.

And just as Jesus noticed what was going on in the Temple Treasury, so too God has taken note of Tobit's family's religion.

The same is true with us. We are to live each day as a response to the love of God. Like flowers that grow under the influence of the warmth of the sun and moisture for a summer rain, we live with genuine faith when we allow the influence of his love for form us.

Like the widow and those characters in the Book of Tobit we take to heart Raphael's council:

Bless God each and every day; sing his praises.

As this morning's passage ends we are told this is just what Tobit and his family did.

They kept blessing God and singing his praises, and they acknowledged God for these marvelous deeds of his, when an angel of God had appeared to them.

May we live this day with such purposeful and sincere religious practise so that we can sing with Tobit his Canticle:

***So now see what he has done for you;
acknowledge him at the top of your voice.
Bless the Lord of righteousness,
and exalt the King of the ages.***

Such is to be our response to God's generous and unconditional love. Such devotion is what Jesus notices.