

God's Puzzling Words

Homily for September 30th 2022

Today's readings are a kind of word puzzle. In both God speaks in language that can be challenging to piece together. In the reading from Luke the Lord's words come across as harsh as he pronounces woe on three of the towns that Jesus would have frequented in his public ministry. What he is expressing here are words of judgment because the one who is mercy himself and the very manifestation of God's loving presence was rejected. It is one of the great mysteries of the faith that even when God came among us there was such an adverse reaction to him that was characterized by choosing not to repent.

Remember the word repentance means to change ones' mind. So when Jesus says that Tyre and Sidon would have repented long ago he means the following. These two towns were not in Jewish territory and were a perennial enemy of Israel. Jesus is saying that if these towns had witnessed what Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum had witnessed of the Lord's mercy they would have had the change of mind and heart that Jesus states is the appropriate response to his Gospel message. In this passage we hear God speak in the intimacy of being present in the person of Jesus. What we learn about the puzzle of Jesus' language here is the expectation that our response to him will result in seeing the world and ourselves differently, trustingly dependent upon his mercy and love,

In the reading from Job, we have God speak not intimately but in all of his omnipotent glory and splendour. It is language that is direct, and can overwhelm us. It is helpful to know that in the book of Job, this is the first time God appears to Job and speaks. Up until now the book has been comprised of speeches given by Job and his friends as they try to make sense of Job's intense suffering.

As God speaks here the intention behind his words is to help draw Job out of looking just at his suffering real and intense though it is. The speech of God is to call Job into a place where he can see his life, not as insignificant but rather as part of this much greater reality; his place within a universe made up of light and darkness, good and evil that we cannot fully understand. Job's words in response to God words are an expression of the repentance Jesus spoke of in today's Gospel.

Job's encounter with God's limitless power and wisdom has silenced his tongue and stilled the storms of his mind. Job has come to see that God has ordered all things in the universe according to a divine wisdom that surpasses human understanding. That God is not accountable to men or required to give an answer to their every demand; and that wisdom consists, not in solving the riddle of suffering, but in humbling oneself before the Lord. Many years ago the early Christian writer and Bishop St. Basil counselled:

Be assured that whatever God ordains, even if its reason lies beyond us, is always the work of One who is wise. We should accept it, no matter how difficult it may be to endure, for God knows and appoints what is best for each of us¹.

Not only are God's words a puzzle but so too can be our lives. But as we listen to the one who speaks to us in the Scriptures and take to heart our smallness amidst the grandeur of the universe we can trustingly sing with the psalmist:

O Lord, you have searched me and know me, therefore I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works.

¹ Hahn, S., & Mitch, C. (2014). [Job: With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes](#) (Second Catholic Edition, p. 53). Ignatius Press.