

8th Sunday after Trinity, 10 August 2015, Andrea Bianchi

Readings: Psalm 50, 1-8, 23-end / Hebrews 11,1-3, 8-16 / Luke 12, 32-40

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in you sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

One of the simplest ways to explain who God is to children is to say that God is greater than all there is. God is greater than the mountains, faster than any rocket and stronger than a lion. God is a kind of super-hero. He has power to do anything he wants and to put everything right. This concept of God is what we sometimes call the omnipotent God – the all-powerful God. Of course there is also the loving God, the forgiving God, but let us stay with the idea of the all-powerful God. This idea of God clashes sometimes with our adult minds, when we hear and read of poverty, starving children, war, exploitation and all sorts of other sufferings in the world. After all, we imagine that God should put all things right – we imagine that God should constantly be correcting every inch of evil in the world.

So where does this leave this concept, this idea of the all-powerful God? We know from the Bible and from all the joys in our lives that God is perfect love, so the recurring question is: how can we make sense of such evil in the world, despite God's love? There are many possible explanations, but I am sure some of you are already thinking about human freedom. Yes, God respects our freedom in the most perfect way, and this allows for the possibility of doing good or evil – but let us explore this in light of today's Gospel.

In today's Gospel we heard about the master of the house, he left for a wedding and then returned. In ancient times weddings could last several days or even up to a week. So let us imagine that the time when the master of the house was absent was not a very long time, yet a long enough time for some evil to happen within his household having left his servants in charge of the house. Today we read chapter 12 of the Gospel of Luke up to verse 40, but if we read a bit further up to verse 43 and beyond, we would read that the servants are supposed to do work while the master is absent. They need to keep the household functioning. But there is the possibility that servants, instead of serving, start to take possession of other servants, act as masters of the household, damage it and get so dizzy with this idea of being the masters of the household that they act like as if they "got drunk" with their newly discovered power. When the master returns, we read in verse 46, these evil servants will perish.

So, today's Gospel is first an invitation to be good servants, to be of good service within God's household, that is this world and all the people in it. As we read in Isaiah, to be good servants means to do acts of justice, it means to any good we can identify and realise in the world, big or small, and acts of forgiveness. Sometimes we look really far for people who need help, but in this Gospel story the people of the same household serve each other, they work with each other. Too often we imagine that only certain people in power really have the power to change things, but in this shared household each has responsibility for each other and this world. So it is an invitation to do acts, big or small, for our neighbours maybe here in this church, or where we live, where we work etc. It is also an invitation to be good stewards of the earth, which is our physical household, and to learn to live in harmony with nature, using its gifts in the right way, without disproportionally possessing and exploiting the resources of the earth.

But let us reconsider the following for a moment: God trusts us so much that he leaves us in charge of his house. If we hear the news on tv, or on the internet, I am not sure what your thoughts are, but I

hear often messages that somehow the world would be better without people, the earth will be healthier and so on. And that it all depends on certain individuals in positions of power. Now, surprisingly, God, who knows perfectly the good and evil we are capable of, leaves us all in charge. He trusts us. Can we stay a moment with this thought, that the creator of the universe, who was, is and ever will be, God, trusts us, wants us to do work for him in his service. I don't know how this makes you feel, but this thought, that God trusts us, should really cure any lack of self-worth we might have. He knows better than we do!

God entrusts the world to us, and there is much we as God's servants under his direction can accomplish in His name, as we willingly give ourselves to his service, while assisting in the building of the kingdom of God – even if this is often very small and even imperfect. And, we read in today's Gospel, we have to be “dressed for action” or “girded for action”. In the Greek text, it says something like “have a belt around your waist”. The crucial verb is an interesting one, it is in Greek “περιζώννυμι” (perizōnnumi). In ancient times, a belt around the waist would allow anyone to move about freely. However, a belt could also be turned into a purse. Let us imagine that we have a belt, turned into a purse, full of heavy metal coins... this makes movement, and service, much harder or even impossible. The initial warning we heard in today's Gospel, about selling possessions and making purses that do not wear out, is related to the heaviness which comes, when possessions threaten to take over our life. This is not an invitation to starve. It is an invitation to not allow our possessions to block our movement, our service. And possessions can be of any kind, it can be money, but it can be a certain job or position of honour, it can be a person we love, it can even be a hobby. God is not against those things, as long as they do not block our movement, weigh us down. Figuratively speaking these possessions are good as long as they do not become heavy belts which make service impossible. So, in order to be good servants, we need to have the right relationship to our possessions, whatever they might be.

Let us now finally return to the initial question, the question about evil in the world. God has not really left this world for a wedding, he is present with us always. He is constantly helping us, consoling us and sowing the seeds of goodness and love. Without his help we can do nothing. But today's story serves to stress that God has put us in charge of this world under his direction and in his service. He has made us stewards of what is his. He trusts us and that we can do something about the evils we see. We cannot be super-heroes, God is the only super-hero, but there is much we can do. However, one day, God will visit us again. Figuratively speaking, the master came back from the wedding. Jesus will come again and put everything right.

Then it will be up to us to be ready. One possibility is that we will joyfully welcome him. He will find us serving his household, with the lamp of faith lit. The lamp of faith we have heard about from Paul in today's reading. The lamp of faith helps us to stay focused on who is the master, God, even if we don't see him with our naked eyes. The lamp of faith will also help us remember what our responsibility is as well as our hope, even if at present so much evil seems to go unpunished. The lamp of faith will make us ready to recognise that it is Jesus who knocks on our door and enables us to willingly welcome him. The other possibility is that we can be drunk with our possessions, sorrows, victimhood and be deaf to his knocking. The Gospel today says that if the master of the house, if God, will find us awake, dressed for service, and ready for him, he will “dress himself for service” and serve us. And here the verb again in the Greek is “περιζώννυμι” (perizōnnumi). So, if we serve each other and so serve God's purpose, God will also serve us. Not only we will experience the joys of service in this life, but God will also invite us to his heavenly banquet. May this wonderful thought of God's trust sustain us when we see so much evil and feel so small, and may our faith in the love and wisdom and power of God help us to stay awake to his voice and his calling. Amen.