

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Resentment troubles our soul whenever we feel someone has treated us unfairly. At times that person is a stranger with a surprising lack of basic friendliness. Other times it's a person we know well—or we thought we knew well—until they said or did something harmful. From infancy people are taught that God is good, so whenever they feel God is unfair, the One in whom we put our trust, they may actually experience resentment toward God.

The happy thoughts that bubble forth from Psalm 100 lay a foundation for a positive trusting relationship with God. “The Lord is God,” it declares. “He made us; we belong to him. We are his people, the sheep of his flock.” The Lord is “faithful from age to age;” “eternal his merciful love.” Therefore, Psalm 100 opens with this admonition: “Cry out with joy to the Lord.” It calls upon “all the earth” to do this because God is good not only from age to age but also from place to place. Whenever another person shows us “merciful love,” we happily want to do something in turn. So Psalm 100 advises us, “Serve the Lord with gladness”—not begrudgingly, but happily, as you would anyone else like the Lord. It's a lovely thought, but people go through times where the ageless love of God is not so noticeable, and they may think God is picking on them, ignoring them, or forgetting all about them.

We sing Psalm 100 today in response to the first reading where Moses hears God establish the covenant. God says to Moses, “tell the Israelites... I bore you up on eagle's wings and brought you here to myself.... If you... keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people.” There we find a clue about why things sometimes go haywire with God. It isn't that God's ways have changed; it may be we have not kept the covenant. When things go wrong, it's easier to blame someone else, but often the responsibility is something we share.

Jesus reflected this insight when he surveyed the crowds of disciples in today's gospel. He noticed something wrong with them. He did not complain about their attitude, their behavior, or their lack of insight. Instead, his “heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd.” He probably still feels the same way about us when we are troubled or feel abandoned. God responds not by rolling his eyes, but extending his arms. As with any medicine, depending on the depth of the wound, healing may take time. It doesn't always happen overnight.

Why would God still care for us when we have lost our way, turned aside, doubted his love, or resented him? Psalm 100 offers this answer: He made us. We belong to him. Especially on Fathers' Day, it's probably easy for those of you who are parents to feel this about your children. You care about them, even when they do not always return the love, even when they resent what you may have done out of mercy.

Resentment against someone sometimes blinds us from noticing all their intentions. When we look at the other side of a troubling situation, we may discover another person who has cares, or who does care in a way that was just hard to see.