

Thoughts on the Readings of January 29, 2023

The Common Thread The Psalm is arresting. Who may dwell with God? Only the one who walks blamelessly may do so. But who is that person apart from the righteousness of God in Christ? Though God has told us what is good, we cannot do it. We confess that we are in bondage to sin and that we cannot free ourselves. It is God alone who has redeemed us from this house of slavery. This is “the word of the cross” that is the power of God at work in our lives. It is those who acknowledge their sin, who confess that they are “poor in spirit,” who receive all the blessings named in the beatitudes. Those who mourn over their sin, and humbly hunger for a righteousness not their own will be satisfied with the kingdom of Christ.

First Reading - [Micah 6:1–8](#) Hear! The word implies hearkening or obeying, instead of simply listening. The prophet pleads the Lord’s case. He begins with an allusion to the first commandment: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” ([Exo. 20:2](#); [Mic. 6:4](#)). This is an ever-present reality; God will not leave his people. He is faithful even when they are faithless ([2 Tim. 2:13](#)). As such, despite the regular unfaithfulness of his people, he continued to bless them — and Micah provides reminders of these blessings. Then the prophet asks God, “What have I done to you” that you would treat me so faithlessly? Have I worn you out with religious duties? “No!” comes the answer. What may a person, wounded in conscience by the prophet’s pleading, do to appease the Lord? Shall she bring sacrifices of animals or even of one’s firstborn child, as Molech required ([Deut. 12:31](#))? Again, “No!” is the answer. All God has ever required since the garden is that his people to walk with him ([Gen 3:8](#)). The result of such “walking” with God is that they will also do justice and love mercy. Here we see the Law and Gospel at work in the prophet. He reminds them first of their guilt and then that God only requires them to return to their original loving devotion ([Rev. 2:4](#)). We too, are reminded of God’s devotion to us, whenever we see the font or receive Holy Communion. These are reminders of our unfaithfulness, as well as God’s faithfulness.

Psalm - [Psalm 15:1–5](#) Who may live with God? What a question! It is difficult to imagine that this question would ever occur to most people. Yet David wonders. Who, indeed! The answer is “no one and everyone.” Only those who walk blamelessly may sojourn with God. That would leave out David. And it would leave out the rest of us, too. No one may dwell with God. So we poor sinners must say with humble yet joyous hearts, “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” In his great mercy, God lends us his righteousness so that we might blamelessly dwell with him.

Second Reading - [1 Corinthians 1:18–31](#) “The word of the cross” is neglected by so many who claim to believe in Christ. Instead, they opt for a word of glory. Their theology is one of gratification instead of grace. Personal glory, found in human promises of better health and wealth, seem to rule the day in the United States. But those who are being saved know better — or, at least, they should know better. What is the word of the cross other than that Jesus was pierced for our transgressions and crushed under the weight of our iniquities ([Isa. 53:5](#))? This is the word that saves and brings peace to the troubled heart. This theology alone informs us that God in his Son paid the fine for our sin. In this word — this theology of the cross with its preaching of Christ crucified — all other matters are clearly understood. The believer revels in this word; those who are perishing consider it imbecility.

Gospel - [Matthew 5:1–12](#) These beatitudes are part of the core teaching of Jesus. Nowhere in his essential didactics do we hear a theology of glory. The poor, the mourners, and the meek are a few of those who will receive God’s richest blessings. Are these gifts of the cross what we ask of God — or do we desire affluence and welfare? Beware your theology, since the rich have already received their reward in full ([Luke 6:24](#)).

More Thoughts “They can't see the forest for the trees” is a saying that could easily be applied to the Church. What difference does it really make whether the Bible is carried into the sanctuary in just the right manner, so long as the Word of God is read? Who cares if the pastor is robed according to someone's rules, as long as the law and grace of God is proclaimed so that consciences are warned

and comforted? Does it really matter that one keeps the Commemorations of Augustine or Luther? These are matters of indifference that the Church still affords too much time and energy. Our attentions are to be given to weightier concerns ([Matt 23:23](#)) that are more profitable to what truly matters to God. How can people know that God loves them when they fear for their souls because they failed in some particular tradition? If they worry that they have forgotten to confess a particular sin, is their focus now upon themselves or upon the one who forgives sin? There are too many trees in the way of our view of God. When traditions keep us from seeing anything other than our ability to keep them, those traditions have failed us. Too often these trees prevent us from seeing the things that benefit us, such as grace, faith, the cross of Christ, and the hope that we have in him alone, but will never have in the keeping of traditions.