

## 28 June 2020: Romans 6:12-23 (Proper 8)

*For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and...greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification (Romans 6:19b).*

The Biblical and traditional Christian view of God's nature and human nature is easily stated. This view stands in opposition to contemporary assumptions as it did to the ancient, pagan worldview. Most ancient peoples saw the universe as vast and humanity as insignificant. For them, creation is far inferior to the divine order; the gods are aloof, disinterested in humanity and human beings. The best we can do is understand and appease the greater order. This old, tired worldview seems perennial.

Christians have traditionally held another view on which is built our theology, morality, and spirituality. I quote an anonymous 4<sup>th</sup> Century Syrian monk: *The (human) heart is only a small vessel, yet dragons are there, and lions; there are poisonous beasts and all the treasures of evil; there are rough and uneven roads, and precipices. But there, too, are God and the angels; life is there and the kingdom; there, too, is Light and there the Apostles, and heavenly cities and treasures of grace. All things lay in that little space.* (Pseudo-Marcarios)

The other view says the universe is a vast macrocosm and we a tiny speck. The traditional Christian view is that human beings are the larger reality, the macrocosm. There is a universe in every human soul which God made for His own habitation. God is not distant or disinterested; God is radically present; and the encounter into which God continually invites us takes place in one's life, within human relationships, even in the intimacy of our thoughts.

Therefore, all of one's life not only can be but is the place and time for God's encounter with us. The other view always leads to barbarism: if we are insignificant specks, then what we do and say does not matter. If a person has no value greater than the moon's dead craters, anyone's life is expendable: violence becomes an acceptable solution even to the most intimate of crises. If the universe is a place of random chance, the collision of impersonal forces, an arena in which the gods cannot be bothered with us—than what value is there in morality, or justice or even truth?

The Christian worldview tells us that everything, everyone matters, because everything and everyone is the context for encounter with God. Every action we contemplate and do, every thought entertained, every word spoken matters because every human being matters. We are the glory of God: we live, move, and have our being in God's Being.

Thus, in Romans, Paul writes extensively on sin and righteousness. Our sinful thoughts and actions—especially those that are habitual—are crucially important because our thoughts, words, and actions, are tokens of either living in and for God, or reveal our hypocrisy, our double-heartedness. Everyone matters, and every thought, word, and action matters. Indeed, our characters are most revealed by what we do, say, and think when no one else is around.

I realize these principles are at odds with our self-absorbed, comfort-obsessed, relativistic, utilitarian society. Take heart: the Christian worldview was not the dominate culture for our distant fathers and mothers in the Faith either. They persevered and triumphed; we can, too, with God's help.

How to put this view into practice? First, we must get into our hearts and not just our heads that everything we do, think, and say counts. Every thought, every word, and every action can be a renewal of our commitment to Christ and a grounding of our lives in Him. So, do what is right; think and say what is good, honorable, and just.

Second, pray continually for discernment and perseverance to live your life in and for Christ. Never tire of such prayers. Habitually ask for God's guidance and mercy.

Third, do not fear failure. You will fail; it is unimportant. Confess your fault to God simply and get on with your life in Him. Confession to a priest may be helpful in restoring hope and strength. In any event, surrender to God all falling short, whether by commission or omission; surrender all lack of integrity, all double-minded and double-heartedness, and be restored. Do not fixate on the problem, seek the solution in Christ.

Last, leave results to God. Do what is right and true; put down whatever injures, flee evil. Think on what builds up. Pray earnestly, humbly, often. Forgive freely, be gentle, give generously, seek God's wisdom in all things, and be patient with yourself and others. Nothing you do for God and for others in Jesus' Name is trivial. Our Lord Jesus will bring even unseen fruit out of all your labors for Him.

We are the glory of God. Where God's glory dwells, there the righteousness of God is revealed. Amen.