

Fourth Friday of Lent ~ 3/23

"Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life; for if the righteous man is God's child, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries. Let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle he is and test his patience." (Wisdom 2:17-19)

There is something reminiscent of the witch trials in this reading. Recall that one of the ways that people suspected of being a witch were tested entailed tying rocks around them and then throwing them into the water. If they floated to the top then they were indeed a witch. If, on the other hand, they sank to the bottom and drowned then they were not involved in witchcraft. Proof of innocence came at a great price for the accused.

We may find this reading difficult to understand in our society because we often equate gentleness with weakness not strength. We might say that the gentleperson is more vulnerable to becoming a victim and that gentleness and courage do not seem to have a lot in common. In fact, isn't the description of Jesus as being meek and humble of heart or the gentle shepherd out of sync with our modern notion of courage? Yet this reading from Wisdom seems to suggest that insulting and torturing a person, the kind of thing that only a brave person would submit to, is, in fact, the surest way to discern if he or she was gentle and patient. If the person survives and fights back then that individual is not gentle or patient. If they are gentle and submit then there is a good chance that they will die.

In this reading from Wisdom the gentleness that the author is speaking of concerns not how He deals with the pain of torture but how He responds to His torturers. In Wisdom the suffering and pain from the torture will determine just how gentle and forgiving this person can be.

Perhaps the person who can let go of revenge and settle for justice is learning how to become a gentle servant of God. Perhaps the innocent victims of hatred who can reach out the hand of friendship to their torturer has come to understand how far gentleness can take us toward salvation.

In the end perhaps gentleness is indeed about courage and bravery. After all Jesus hangs on the cross and asks His Father to forgive those who are killing Him and He is the perfect gentle Lamb.

Questions for Reflection

- 1. Have I met many truly gentle people in my life? Who were they and how did they influence me?*
- 2. How good am I at responding in a gentle way to the pain and suffering that the world throws at me?*