

Merciful God

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Today's Scripture readings compare the consequence of human transgression to God's mercy. Breach of social norms and values by individuals and communities for selfish reasons have dire consequences on the social order. First reading points out that the people of Israel suffering the Babylonian captivity as result to their infidelity to God. Even those who are supposed to know on how to keep the commandments and observe temple rituals did not heed to the warning of the prophets. Since messengers of God speak truth to power, they become the primary victims of the status quo. The status quo is not only resistance to change, has "holier than thou" attitude too. Such attitudes easily create social fissures, operating from an inclusion and exclusion mind set. This weakens the cohesion of the community, which will be unable to withstand human calamities and natural disasters. Yet God's presence and intervention is constant. God does not withhold his mercy and compassion from his people.

Human calamities and natural disasters help us reassess our values and priorities. COVID-19 has revealed the best of us and the worst of us. We are in our best when sharing resources and caring for those in need. We have witnessed love expressed to the point of laying down their lives for others. Many healthcare workers just did that in the rage of COVID-19. These healthcare workers were also like the prophets, telling how to care for ourselves and for others. Our flaws were exposed when we claimed personal freedom and liberty at the expense of the welfare of our brothers and sisters, even our own family members. Like the prophets in the old, we villainized frontline heroes for telling us the scientific reality of the pandemic. The displayed human selfishness and political expediency affected our national cohesion with deadly consequences; the pandemic lingered longer than the expected lifecycle. Regardless of such selfish display of human behavior, God visited his people with compassion. We must evaluate the speedy discovery of potent vaccines to fight the pandemic from as God's direct intervention "through his immeasurable riches of his grace and his kindness in Jesus Christ."

Finally, God's mercy revealed in the suffering of his Son, on the cross so that we may live. Nicodemus, well-polished scholar of his time, goes to Jesus for enlightenment in the darkness of night. He sneaks to visit Jesus, when no one could see him. In today's reading from the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus we learn two things; first, Jesus will be lifted up on the cross, like the serpent Moses lifted in the desert for the victims of the snake bite to live; second, Jesus as the ultimate gift of God's compassion to save the world. Not sure how much Nicodemus, a Jewish scholar learnt out of the dialogue, but he remained faithful disciple of Jesus. He revealed courage and faithfulness by asking for body of Jesus from the cross to give him proper burial. Out of the darkness of night, Nicodemus continues to be an inspiration for us that adversities test our courage to remain faithful, trusting God's compassionate love concerned about our redemption not our condemnation.