

May 23, 2024

Daily Reflections



Center for Spiritual Development

"BETTER THAN TO BE THROWN INTO GEHENNA"

By Sr. Christine Hilliard, CSJ

Today's Gospel

Jesus said to his disciples: "Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward. Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.

"Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if salt becomes insipid, with what will you restore its flavor? Keep salt in yourselves and you will have peace with one another."

Reflection

This list continues Jesus' teaching to give up things that most of us cling to. The style in which these teachings are phrased follows the style of Wisdom writings: "It is better to do *such and such* than to do *this or that*."

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea."

The "little ones" are the powerless persons who follow Jesus. Members of the faith community are meant to support each other no matter what their social or religious status.

- Who do I exclude from my support because of my perception of her/his weak social standing or inability to contribute to society?
- What might change in me if I saw these people through God's eyes?

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Should one's behavior (i.e., hands/feet) or way of thinking and judging (i.e., eye) cause a person to stumble during a test of loyalty to God (i.e., temptation), one must cease such behavior. Better to endure the difficulties of ceasing the behavior now than to endure pain later.

- Which of my behaviors do I need to pay attention to? Which need refining?

"...better ... than ... to be thrown into Gehenna"

Gehenna, a valley near Jerusalem, had an unholy reputation in later Old Testament books because it was the site of a cultic shrine where human sacrifice was offered. A place of darkness, it becomes a reference to where the dead bodies of rebels against Yahweh are entombed.

- What is the Gehenna that I want to avoid?

"Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if salt becomes tasteless,

with what will you restore its flavor? Keep salt in yourselves and you will have peace with one another.”

- Consider the purifying and preserving use of salt in food . . . in life. The quality and use of salt was comparable to the Covenant, the living promise between God and believers. Keep salt close by! What’s the best way to do that?
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Silhouette Photography of Rocky Mountains Under Starry Sky
Photo by Fabio Marciano

For Prayer

Teach me, God, to live out my days focused on all that is meaningful in life.

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