

Daily Meditation 07/12/2023

More from Aquinas on Justice, Holiness and Compassion

Good morning.

Today we meditate again with Thomas Aquinas on the spiritual path of justice and justice making. And it begins with a wonderful statement from the great prophet Isaiah...well, it actually begins with Psalm 15: "Who will dwell in Your tabernacle? One who walks without blemish and exercises justice."

And Aquinas says that Isaiah was talking about two things: justice, which he possessed, and a vision of God. And they follow one after the other: vision of God, justice; justice, vision of God. Justice as employing the vision of God: a vision of a world that is at peace, because peace and justice are meant to go together. And then he says, "The vision of God has arrived at through justice."

So you can see how, beyond the idea of holiness and contemplation as something interior, alone, that the movement from the monastic system to a another way of seeing religion in practice, that movement is realizing that justice and the work for justice is integral to a vision of God. That not all visions of God come by meditation and contemplation. They can help to clear the mind, clear the head, clear the heart, mindfulness coming from mind emptiness.

But then what? Then comes the service, then comes restructuring our worlds, who are often quite distanced from justice. our professions, our work worlds, our citizenship. Yes, our courts, law, and judges,

And then he takes a line from the Psalms. He says that the Psalmist compares justice to mountains: mountains are big and strong and very visible. The Psalmist compares truth to clouds; that clouds are above the mountains, they're higher. And they're whisking, they move a lot. And compassion to the sky, which is higher than anything else. So the sky is represented for space, the vastness out there.

So these three things, mountains, clouds, skies, are equivalent to justice and truth and compassion.

And he says that doing justice is imitating God. And this is also linked to compassion: "Be you compassionate," and courageous as well as compassionate, for the compassion has to take place with deeds, he says, it requires deeds.

It's not just feeling, as feeling bad for people; it's not pity; it's not dropping crumbs from the table.

Compassion and justice are very closely aligned. And it does have to do with deeds. It's not enough to feel compassion, we have to do compassion. Says Aquinas:

You find these two things, compassion and justice, in all the works of God. It's necessary that they be joined together, compassion and truth will not forsake you. (citing Proverbs 3)

Notice how he brings compassion and truth together, and justice and truth together: as bell hooks says, "The heart of justice is truth telling."

So ringing the bell, telling the truth about what's going on in the Supreme Court today behind the scenes, the hobnobbing with billionaires who are having cases before the court, and hobnobbing with hate groups that have cases before the court, and not telling, not revealing it, no transparency -- that ain't justice.

To be compassionate (says Aquinas) is to have a heart that suffers from the misfortune of others, because we think of it as our own. You are truly compassionate when you are eager to repel the misfortune of others.

But he also says that we need to learn to take pleasure in our just deeds. That the heart of a virtuous person is to be joyful in doing virtue; virtue is not about duty for Aquinas. It's not about duty. It's about joy. That's where joy comes in again, joy and justice, that there's joy in seeing injustice melt and bring justice.

Consider the day that the voting rights bill was signed after years of marching and going to jail, and fighting, and some people dying to bring about civil rights in the 50s and 60s. And here this is being dismantled by the current Supreme Court.

So just as there's anger at this loss of justice, so there's joy in bringing about a fuller balanced expression of justice, and this joy or the aspiration for it keeps one going, fighting the good fight.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.