

Daily Meditation 10-30-23

Good News in Times of War: We are Capable of Compassion (Aquinas)

Good morning.

In this morning's meditation, we take up the important question. In a time of war, and rumors of war, threats of war, even threats of genocide -- it is so important that we humans hear again, from all voices, from all corners of the earth, and from all religions:

How it is that we are capable of compassion?

So much press, and so much science, and so much technology, and so much money, so much politics, goes into the arts of war.

How much goes into the arts of compassion?

Previously, we heard from Rabbi Heschel and Elie Wiesel from the Jewish tradition, and from Mosab abu Toha from Muslim practice, that compassion is something we are capable of. Mohammed thought:

God will not show mercy to one who does not show mercy to others. The believer is not one who eats his fill, when his neighbor beside him is hungry. A person does not believe until one loves for one's brother, what one loves for oneself.

In today's meditation, we talk about Thomas Aquinas from the Christian tradition, reminding us that it is through compassion that human beings imitate God. It's very much a Jewish teaching, that compassion is a secret name for God. And it's not enough just to know that we are images of God, but to practice it, to be compassionate, because God is compassionate. And Jesus taught that.

Howard Thurman, a Christian (and more than Christian) preacher and theologian, talks about how Jesus came from a place of poverty. And he says,

The masses of people are poor. In one's poverty, one was more truly Son of Man, than one would have been, if the incident of family or birth had made Jesus a rich son of Israel. Jesus was a member of a minority group. And he created a formula to empower the poor and the oppressed, when he said 'The kingdom of heaven is in us, and the kingdom of God is in us.'

Says Thurman:

He recognized with authentic realism that anyone who permits another to determine the quality of their inner life, gives into the hands of the other, the keys to his destiny. The solution which Jesus found for himself, and for Israel, as they faced the hostility of the Greco-Roman world, becomes a word in the work of redemption for all the cast-down people, in every generation and in every age: that Jesus devised a technique of survival for the oppressed. That is why John's Gospel could say, 'In him was life, and the life was the light of men.'

Wherever his spirit appears, the oppressed gather fresh courage, for he announced the good news: that fear, hypocrisy, and hatred -- the three hounds of hell -- attract the trail of the disinherited, need have no dominion for them.

That we are all bigger than the fear, the hypocrisy, and the hatred, that comes down on people, and that we could be, if we are not careful, agents of them.

And for Thurman, the grounding is a realization of our being sons and daughters of God. Entertaining the kingdom and the queendom of God within us, resisting hatred and hypocrisy and fear. And therefore being compassionate, as our Creator in heaven is compassionate.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.