

“If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (Ps 95:8). Psalm 95 is a call to holiness. We must listen with our hearts to hear the Lord. And hearing the Lord, we are called to respond with a mercy and love from our own hearts. The heart is not a mere organ that pumps blood to all parts of our body. The heart is mentioned over a thousand times in Scripture. It is the emotional center of life (Hahn 346). A healthy heart listens to God and responds with love and mercy to the stranger and the forsaken in our midst.

The Prophet Jeremiah tells us that God alone understands the human heart. “I, the LORD, explore the mind and test the heart, giving to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their deeds” (17:10). At a cemetery we often see headstones that tells us a little about the person who has passed. God reads the human heart like a stone tablet. The sin of a nation is “written with an iron stylus, engraved with a diamond point upon the tablets of their hearts” (17:1). And for an unrepentant nation, sin casts a long shadow. “I will enslave you to your enemies in a land you do not know” (17:4).

God is constantly reaching out to call us back into right relationship, but all too often his pleas fall on hardened hearts. The Israelites “walked in the hardness of their evil hearts and turned their backs, not their faces, to me. From the day that your fathers left the land of Egypt even to this day, I have sent you untiringly all my servants the prophets” (Jer 7:24-25).

The wise man turns to God, but the unwise turn from him. “Cursed is the man who trusts in human beings, who makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD” (17:5). God can strengthen us and make us resilient in the face of overwhelming obstacles. The heart firmly planted in God is like a strong tree with deep roots that stretches out its roots to the stream where it is nurtured with life giving water.

In confusion and in human frailty, we may not always hear clearly. “More tortuous than anything is the human heart, beyond remedy; who can understand it?” (17:9). The voices of the world seem to be so loud that they drown out the quiet and subtle voice of the Lord. The troubled heart cannot find rest for the things of this world do not satisfy. They only make us crave more of that which can never fill us. God on the other hand sees clearly and tries to guide us to the truth. The heart at peace rests in the Lord in good times and in bad.

Time and again throughout the Gospels, Jesus sees faith in individuals who come forward seeking a miracle if not for themselves than for someone they love dearly with their hearts. Jesus reads their hearts and responds to the faith that is present. And where the faith is lacking, Jesus is willing to put his very heart on the line. In the face of sin, in the face of rejection, in the face of betrayal, Jesus offered his life on the cross. He pours blood out of his Sacred Heart for the forgiveness of our sins.

In his 1st letter to the Corinthians, Paul tells us how to respond with a heart that acknowledges the sacrifice of Jesus and responds in kind.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails” (13:4-8).
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