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Good and Evil

by Pauline Grimshaw

Readings

Psalm 120

Luke 17:26-37

Divine Providence 234

What a week of turmoil and upheaval and violence this past week has been, a week surely which history will record. In contrast to the euphoric moments at the beginning of the month at the Olympic games the past two weeks have seen the shooting of innocent people in Plymouth and the desperation of the people of Afghanistan as the Taliban over- run their country. Even the weather seemed to be mourning.

When disasters and tragedies occur we are tempted to ask again the questions that we so often ask in our natural lives, 'Why do these things happen?' 'Where is God?' or perhaps 'Is there a God who can allow these things to happen.' It is very hard to address causes, and so often

comments appear trite unless one has also been through harrowing situations. We can watch tragedies and loss of life in other countries on television in a curiously detached way, but when things happen nearer to home they seem that much more frightening and that much more real. The phrase from our New Testament reading 'The one shall be taken and the other shall be left' seems chillingly prophetic. It is very natural indeed that people should be frightened, bewildered and upset by acts of seemingly random violence. Would we have been far less upset if so many deaths had been neatly spaced out in, say, road accidents throughout the year? The contrast between happiness and sadness, and good and evil, seems so much more graphic.

Yet acts of violence and brutality are part of a much wider picture. To attempt to close the focus to individual suffering is a very difficult thing to do. We can only view the picture as one small part of a much greater and more complex scene embracing both this world and the spiritual world. However much information we think we have, we can never see even the worldly panorama, let alone the spiritual one. The Lord alone knows the motives of all concerned and the Lord alone knows the nature of the evil influences and the spiritual causes of such acts. It is in many ways a very good thing that we cannot see into the future, for if we could see, the power of freedom of choice would be taken away from us as we would attempt to alter the course of that future.

As a starting point we can take the premise that the human race was created by the wisdom of a loving 'Being' wishing to share that love with others. The Lord's purpose in creation was a heaven of angels from the human race. Each human being was born with the gifts of freedom and rationality to enable them to choose to live a life from the love of self, or a life of love towards other people and towards their Creator. It is not the will of the Lord that natural tragedies happen but rather that tragedies happen as permission. It is rather like a parent bringing up a child carefully and with every advantage. The child ultimately has to leave home and be responsible for living an independent life without the parents having to constantly bail that child out. If parents intervene to prevent the grown child from living as he/she wishes they are seen – at best – as interfering busy bodies and will probably push the child towards the very things that the parent wishes them to avoid. The price of freedom and rationality in this world is often physical death.

As we read in Divine Providence the mind of a person often travels in the opposite direction to the mind of the Lord. Yet the Lord still tries to gently lead a person from doing evil and constantly tries to incline a person to do good. However, to preserve freewill and to ensure that the purpose of the Creator, a heaven of angels from the human race, is fulfilled, it is necessary that the laws of Providence in creation are not subverted and that evil is tolerated or permitted.

Both this world and the spiritual world are battlegrounds for the forces of good and evil. As individuals we frequently want our way and all of us at times think that our way is best. If we feel particularly strongly about a thing we might protest very strongly indeed and be very manipulative to get what we want. Usually and thankfully the laws of the land act as a deterrent to us doing what we wish. However, if we do not recognise laws and justice our wishes will override the concerns of others. Governments and political factions are collections of human beings with the range of human concerns and, like us all, are collectively capable of being good and wise or evil and hellish.

Is there anything that we can do? As individuals we may feel that we can do very little, and in the short term that may be so. For in many ways the only person that we can change is one's self. Yet think how many times one person has changed the course of history. How can we change ourselves and do something positive? Perhaps we should all try not to take the easy option but from time to time point out the things that we see to be wrong. We can always write to newspapers, and to MPs and religious leaders. We ourselves should consider from time to time whether we are being selfish. Many of us are selfish without even being aware of it. Are we wasteful of the earth's resources? Do we get cross, grumpy or bad tempered with others unnecessarily, do we always look on the black side of things, do we put others down, do we think we always know best? Perhaps the turning of the tide of evil begins with ourselves – it's the only place where we can make a start, and evil is within each and every one of us. 'Let our light shine before men.'

We should also remember to give thanks that we all have the opportunity to use the gift of life wisely and well, and to do as little harm and as much good as we possibly can to all others in our orbit. May we not waste one precious moment of our earthly lives harbouring evil thoughts but instead try to live our lives as our Creator intended.

Unripe Fruit

by Geoffrey Bentley

At this time of year, I look round my garden to see what has been a success or a failure.

This time last year the pear tree was laden with lovely William pears. This year - nothing, due to the late frost which came when the tree was in full flower in April.

The squirrels and the birds have enjoyed the Tayberries and Loganberries. Mercifully they leave the blackberries alone.

The top apple tree is full of fruit, some attacked by brown rot. So I have to pick the apples before they are fully ripe, cook them adding loads of sugar.

As a boy playing cricket on the field, one of our group would sneak away and scrump (steal) unripe apples which we ate and suffered from afterwards. The boy who did the stealing became a policeman!

In the Word, ripe fruits represent good works done lovingly, carefully and under Divine Guidance. I feel that unripe fruit still represents good works done out of duty, grudgingly and with little grace. A good job done out of fear of punishment; to earn money to feed the family. Good done because we HAVE to do it rather than want to do it. How often are we like that!

There was a lot of unripe fruit being presented at the recent Conference AGM. Let us hope that the fruit on offer next year is more wholesome and sweet!

