

A Reading From the Book of Prophet Samuel (1 Sm 8: 4-7, 10-14, 17-22a) *Israel asks for a king*

All the elders of Israel came in a body to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, “Now that you are old, and your sons do not follow your example, appoint a king over us, as other nations have, to judge us.” Samuel was displeased when they asked for a king to judge them. He prayed to the LORD, however, who said in answer: “Grant the people’s every request. It is not you they reject, they are rejecting me as their king.”

Samuel delivered the message of the LORD in full to those who were asking him for a king. He told them: “The rights of the king who will rule you will be as follows: He will take your sons and assign them to his chariots and horses, and they will run before his chariot. He will also appoint from among them his commanders of groups of a thousand and of a hundred soldiers. He will set them to do his plowing and his harvesting, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will use your daughters as ointment makers, as cooks, and as bakers. He will take the best of your fields, vineyards, and olive groves, and give them to his officials.

He will tithe your flocks and you yourselves will become his slaves. When this takes place, you will complain against the king whom you have chosen, but on that day the LORD will not answer you.” The people, however, refused to listen to Samuel’s warning and said, “Not so! There must be a king over us. We too must be like other nations, with a king to rule us and to lead us in warfare and fight our battles.” When Samuel had listened to all the people had to say, he repeated it to the LORD, who then said to him, “Grant their request and appoint a king to rule them.” The Word of the Lord. R. Thanks be to God.

Reflection ~ The folly of self-will

The downfall of God’s chosen nation. Israel was God’s chosen nation from which the Messiah was to come. They were a privileged nation with God as their king who governs through His appointed delegates. At this time, Prophet Samuel was God’s delegate. However, they did not really understand their privileged situation. They took God for granted, their minds became darkened, their hearts hardened. They became unfaithful, forsook God and began serving idols. As a community, they failed. The situation came to a head when they rejected the government of God over them, and clamoured for a human king. Instead of cherishing the privilege of being the nation on earth with God as king, they wanted to trade in this honour to become like the other nations with a human king. It was like history repeating itself when Esau, Isaac’s older son sold his birthright for a bowl of stew in his thirst. God was hurt in both instances. For Israel, it was one of the saddest moments in its turbulent history.

“Grant their request and appoint a king to rule them.” God respects the self will of man. After explaining to them the folly of their request, God never forced His will on His people. Their wish was granted as requested. Samuel appointed Saul to be the first king to govern the Israel nation. Thus, the history of the chosen nation became tied inextricably to a succession of kings whose human weaknesses and failings cannot fail to have a rippling effect on the journey of the Jewish nation. Once a king was appointed, there was no turning back just as after Esau finished his bowl of soup, there was no asking back from Jacob his birthright. God saw how in both cases the privileges He lovingly bestowed were treated with contempt.

God’s will is all mercy and love. The Israelites did not want to wait on God. They were unhappy with the dishonesty of Samuel’s sons and were distrustful of this system of God governing through His appointed representatives. They had forgotten how God had brought them out of Egypt, with many signs and wonders, an almighty God who can more than help them fight their battles. They had forgotten that theirs was a loving God whose will for them is mercy and love itself. God wants the best for them! But they were not cooperative.

Conversation with Our Lord

Precious Lord, how many times have I insisted on what I want without really reflecting on how You feel. I know that many troubles that I encountered are a result of the exercise of my own will. Lord, please forgive me for hurting You. In Your infinite wisdom and love, You have lovingly crafted a beautiful, unique plan for my life. This plan cannot be automatically carried out with my cooperation, my response in love, my trustful surrender of my free will. Lord, help me understand that in Your will is my self-fulfilment, my security, my lasting peace and joy. Immaculate Heart of Mary, give me the grace of a great desire to do God’s will always. Thank You, Jesus. Praise You, Jesus.

I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to your word. Luke 1:38