

September 27, 2009

The Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

The patriarchal setting of the Book of Job prompted some rabbis to speculate that Moses himself was its author (Talmud, *Baba Bathra* 14b). Although nobody today, as far as I know, holds that opinion, it is not without its attraction, especially if one considers certain affinities between the two men.

Most notable among these, perhaps, was the shared meekness of Moses and Job. Both could be called *'anav*, a Hebrew word signifying poverty of spirit. This adjective is often translated as "poor," but it indicates a spiritual quality, better rendered as "meek."

Thus, Job appears to include himself when he speaks of the *'anevei 'ares*, "the meek of the land" (Job 24:4). Meekness certainly describes the patience with which the man of Uz accepts his sufferings, particularly the psychological pain inflicted by his three so-called comforters. These self-righteous men, who are the very opposite of meek, bring this quality of Job into sharper prominence.

As for Moses, we are told he was *'anav me'od mikkol ha'adam*, "meek beyond all mankind" (Numbers 12:3). The meekness of Moses, I suppose, was most obvious when he endured the sundry complaints of those cantankerous Israelites, who daily burdened his life in the desert.

In this respect, we should observe that both Moses and Job are portrayed, not as giants on the earth, but as ordinary men, frail human beings. Each of them is introduced simply as a 'man," an *'ish*. As though, foretelling Job's story as a whole, this noun is the first word used to describe him: *'ish hayah*, "a man there was." Not a champion, not a hero, just a man.

The same noun, *'ish*, is used of Moses in the very place where he is called "meek." The verse begins, *weha'ish Mosheh 'anav*, "the man Moses was meek" (Numbers 12:3).

This description of "the man Moses" comes between two stories in which his desert compatriots put his patience severely to the test. So hard was the first trial that Moses complained to God, "Why have You afflicted Your servant? Why have I not found favor in Your sight that You should lay on me the burden of all these people?" (Numbers 11:11). This problem is barely settled when Moses next finds himself challenged by his brother and sister, who demand to know, "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through

us also?" This is the setting in which "the man Moses was meek beyond all mankind."

The Lord's response to the complaint of Aaron and Miriam bears close inspection and should be compared with the response He gives to the comforters of Job. We will examine the two cases together. I want to do this according to the canonical Greek text, where the parallels between the two accounts---as I hope to demonstrate---are intentionally crafted by the translator of Job.

Prior to our comparison of these two stories, it is necessary to comment briefly about the various Greek nouns used to translate the Hebrew word *'eved*, "servant." The translators of our Greek Old Testament were familiar with different kinds of servants, and they recognized those differences in the ways they rendered the single underlying Hebrew noun.

For example, the word *'eved*---"servant"---when it refers to Moses (Exodus 4:10 and many other places) or Job (Job 1:8; 2:3 and so forth), is never translated as *doulos*, a noun suggesting a state of bondage. The Greek translators did not consider this a word appropriate to speak of Moses and Job.

Another Greek word for "servant" is *pais*, a noun more suggestive of a house servant. Although the Book of Exodus does not apply this term to Moses, the Book of Job uses it to speak of Job at the book's beginning (Job 1:8).

A third way of translating the Hebrew *'eved* is *therapon*, a noun suggesting greater intimacy with the master, such as an attendant, a companion in arms. In classical literature, for instance, Patroclus was the *therapon* of Achilles. Because the service of a *therapon* was free, no Greek would have confused him with a *doulos*.

In the Greek Old Testament the preferred term for Moses is *therapon* (e.g., Exodus 4:10; Numbers 12:7; Wisdom 10:16). So much was this the case, that in our earliest Christian literature, this term was reserved exclusively for Moses (Hebrews 3:5; Clement of Rome, 4:12; 43:1; 51:3; Pseudo-Barnabas 14:4).

Although, as we have seen, the Book of Job begins by calling him God's *pais*, by the end of the book he has become God's *therapon*. (I follow the codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, which are more consistent on this point.) Why this change? The reason, I believe, is the translator's recognition of a likeness to Moses in the final scene of Job's vindication before his three accusers. This scene reminded the translator of the episode in which the Lord vindicated Moses against Aaron and Miriam.

We are ready now to compare these stories; I propose to do so with four observations:

First, in both the stories God begins by appearing on the scene and revealing Himself. In the Moses account we are told, "the Lord came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle and called Aaron and Miriam." In the corresponding narrative of Job, we read, "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind."

Second, in each case the Lord, having revealed Himself, vindicates His faithful servant against his accusers. Thus, we are told, the Lord speaks face-to-face with "*My servant* Moses," inasmuch 'he is faithful in all My house." We note here the significant expression "*My servant* Moses"---*ho therapon* *Mou Moyses*. The same words are repeated when the Lord interrogates Aaron and Miriam, "Why then were you not afraid to speak against *My servant* Moses?"

Using this identical expression, the Lord is equally displeased with Job's challenger, Eliphaz the Temanite: ""My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken right of Me, as *My servant* Job [*ho therapon* *Mou Job*]." Job, who began as God's *pais*, is now identified as God's *therapon*. The quality of Job's service to God has undergone a transformation since the beginning of the book. He has now become, like Moses, the intimate of God.

Third, both Moses and Job intercede with the Lord on behalf of their critics. Thus, Moses pleads for the healing of Miriam. In the case of Job, the Lord instructs Eliphaz, "go to *My servant* Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and *My servant* Job shall pray for you. For I will accept him, lest I deal with you according to your folly; because you have not spoken right of Me, as *My servant* Job." Here the word *therapon* is found three more times, as though to make sure that the reader does not miss Job's correspondence to Moses.

Fourth, in both stories the designation of God's *therapon* comes from the Lord Himself: "My servant." Only God can identify His close associate, His companion in arms. The highest testimony the Lord gives of His faithful servant Job---after his severe trials---is to liken him to Moses.

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All Saints Orthodox Church
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America
4129 W. Newport Avenue / Chicago, IL 60641

Church Office: (773) 777-0749
<http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/>

Father Patrick Henry Reardon, Pastor
phrii@touchstonemag.com

Pastor's Daily Biblical Reflections:
www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html

Pastoral Ponderings:
http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral_ponderings.php