

**April 21, 2013**

Last Sunday of the Great Fast

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

### **Qualities of the Heart**

St. Luke's account of the Parable of the Sower includes features not found in the corresponding passages of Mark and Matthew; one of those features is the form of the final verse, translated thus in the New King James Version: "But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15).

The distinguishing features of this verse have mainly to do with vocabulary:

First, Luke mentions "patience." Indeed, this word, *hypomone*, never appears in the other gospels, and Luke uses it only one other time: "In your patience (*hypomone*) you will possess your souls" (21:19).

Second, only Luke mentions the "heart" in this place. This detail, too, fits a pattern: Luke employs the noun *kardia* 22 times—plus 21 times in Acts—more than any of the other three gospels. Among the pertinent verses, we may best remember, "Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart" (2:19). For Luke, hearing the Word of God---the very point of the parable---has to do with the proper cultivation of the heart.

We should also mention the possible influence of St. Paul in this respect, keeping in mind Luke's close and constant association with him. The word "heart" appears 52 times in the Pauline corpus; 11 of these are in Ephesians and Colossians, two shorter epistles Paul composed while Luke was at his side (cf. Colossians 4:14).

Third, Luke employs two adjectives to describe the heart; in the NKJV they are "noble and good." This English rendering summons further scrutiny, because the precise meaning of these adjectives, in this context, is not immediately apparent.

In the NKJV here, "good" is the rendering of *agathe*, a term that covers the notion of goodness in pretty much all its meanings. In the Lukan context its significance is chiefly moral, as it is in the Wisdom literature of the Greek Old Testament. This was not a hard call for the NKJV translators.

On the other hand, when those translators rendered the adjective kale as "noble"---in a "noble heart"---this was a tough and perhaps uncertain call. The Greek root kal- is so rich that the English tongue faces a heavy challenge to render it with a single equivalent word. No matter how one chooses to translate it, some aspect of kalos is sure to be left out.

A common rendering of kalos indicates an aesthetical dimension; it signifies good in the sense of beautiful. For instance, the Greek version of Genesis uses this adjective to translate the Hebrew tov. Thus, "God saw that the light was kalon," and so on. It is significant that the Greek translators chose kalon over the more general agathon here. Their choice was surely determined by the sentence's verb, "God saw the light." The light, that is to say, was visually good; hence, beautiful, or attractive. Thus, too, the Psalmist commented how kalon it was to see the brethren dwelling together in unity.

One doubts, nonetheless that this meaning of the adjective exhausts its significance here in Luke, because the context indicates a moral sense; the kardia described as kale, after all, is engaged in the exercise of patience. In this passage of Luke the ascetical seems to trump the aesthetical; hence, the "noble heart" of the NKJV.

I wonder, nonetheless, if "noble" is the best choice, even to render the moral sense of the underlying Greek. "Noble" is what we call a "class standard"; it refers to behavior befitting a nobleman. This can hardly be, I think, what Luke had in mind. Perhaps "virtuous" better fits the bill.

I am disposed to argue that Luke intended both senses of the word: beautiful and virtuous. This preference of mine, however, hardly renders easier the work of the translators, who are severely taxed to convey the sense of kale with a single equivalent English word. I don't envy them.

In respect to this adjective, translators of Luke have the same problem as translators of Aristotle. How should they render---with a single word---the kalon which Aristotle identified as the highest good? The new translation of the Ethics by Bartlett and Collins renders to to kalon as "the noble"; they are impressed by the moral, courageous, self-sacrificing quality of the term. Reviewing their work, however, Diana Schaub wonders if they are not imposing on Aristotle's to kalon a more active, less contemplative, sense than is warranted. Perhaps so. Anyway, the discussion goes on.

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