

31st January 2021

Protection

“Unto God’s gracious mercy and protection we commit thee.”

The Book of Common Prayer (1662), The Visitation of the Sick

What does it mean to believe in, and to pray for, the protection of God? Praying for “gracious mercy” I can understand, for we know our failings well enough to grasp the truth that grace and mercy are necessary for an understanding, and the living out, of a fuller life. But “protection”? Protection from what? And if we yearn for protection and then feel “unprotected” because bad things have happened to us, has God failed? Were our prayers useless? Was our faith not strong enough?

I wrestled with this issue in my hospice ministry. On many occasions I saw people – some, devoutly Christian – praying for the protection of God. There was the expectation that this would create a divine aura around a loved one which cancer would not penetrate. Or they believed that the protection of God would mean a terminal illness would disappear and a loved one would be delivered from death because God willed it so.

We cannot, and should not expect to be, protected from pain, suffering and mortality. No amount of faith, and no depth of devotion and prayer, will make it so. It’s a misunderstanding of the nature of God. God’s protection doesn’t mean building defences around us that cannot be breached. Instead, our prayers should be for a protection of our resolve so that we might not crumble in the face of the trials and troubles of life.

In *The Quiet American*, Graham Green writes: “Innocence always calls mutely for protection, when we would be so much wiser to guard ourselves against it: innocence is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world meaning no harm.”

Let us, therefore, guard against the naïve “innocence” of faith that expects divine protection from all harm and, instead, open ourselves to the wisdom of faith in the constant presence of our loving God.

A prayer for today

*“Grant me protection, merciful Lord, prostrate here at your door;
Guard me and keep me, Friend of the humble, weary from wandering far.
You love the devout and recover the sinful; to you alone I address this prayer:
Take me and hold me, merciful Lord, carry me safely to joy.”*

Sikh Scriptures – Adi Granth: Guru Arjan Var Jaitasari

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