

The Fickle and Frail Arm of Flesh

“Put not your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; In that very day his plans perish”.

(Psalm 146:3-4)

Predators, with few exceptions, are loners. Their confidence is in their strength, speed, teeth, claws, cunning, and stealth. Creatures who are commonly preyed upon by their enemies, on the other hand, are gregarious, depending upon their peers and, often, one who has protective powers. Cattle, goats, sheep which have no herdsman, usually follow one of their own of unusual size and proven strength.

Humanity falls in this latter category. Hunter though he may be, he is nevertheless hunted. The terror which a young child has of the darkness testifies of the reality of peril lurking in the shadows. He longs for someone, bigger and stronger and wiser than he is to be with him and give him assurance that he will not be caught and devoured.

So we depend upon one another. And we should. A repeated refrain of New Testament church life echoes with “one another”. We are all members of the one body of Christ edifying, upholding, strengthening and drawing strength from one another.

But that is something very different from the idea embodied in our text. The comforts we glean from the church flow from its Head who is Christ. Our trust is not in the fleshy arm but the Spiritual Head. Not so with the person who puts his trust in man or men. These are those who have no God, no Christ or communion of saints. All they have is their own arm of flesh, and whoever else they may think might be willing to help them. This is the vain hope that is built into companies, corporations, fraternities, sororities, lodges, clubs, political parties and politics in general. These are all composed of people whom other people think will help them. Those candidating for offices in these institutions wish to have people believe in them. Gullible people, at the same time, wish to believe in these fleshy, frail, fickle, dying mortals.

The psalmist brings powerful arguments to deter us from this folly. Most of these fellows do not qualify as princes. They are closer to scoundrels, most of them of poorer and weaker character than the people they rule. How foolish to put our hopes in such. They will promise to be our advocate and helper only until someone else comes along who has more to offer than we, then they will turn and betray us. But even if the man in whom we trust is a prince in every sense of the word; if his heart is pure, his word true, if his hand holds firmly the scepter of power, and he is sincere and diligent to be our help... he may perish at any time. And the moment his breath leaves his body, all his plans and intentions perish. Our hope has been in the wind...and it has evaporated!

“Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord, his God Who made heaven and earth”. (vs.5-6)

- C. M.