

The Myth of Sisyphus

Photo: Uniphoto Press

When our materialistic wealth begins to show signs of decline during economic crises such as the one that has unfolded lately, people begin to pursue spiritual wealth. Among the works of French writer Albert Camus is a philosophical essay titled "*The Myth of Sisyphus*." Sisyphus, a well-known figure in Greek mythology, angered the gods, and as punishment, he was condemned to the hard labor of pushing a heavy rock from the bottom of a hill to the top. The moment the rock reaches the hilltop, however, it is destined to always roll down again. Sisyphus pushes the fallen rock to the top once more. The rock falls down again. This keeps on repeating itself. Given such punishment, is Sisyphus unhappy? Camus' answer is "no." To endlessly continue pushing up the rock to the hilltop is his mission. As long as humans have a mission to carry out, they are happy, even if there are no fruitful results. The point Camus makes is that while Sisyphus may seem unhappy by outer appearance, he is inwardly happy as long as his sense of mission is fulfilled. I agree that this kind of thinking can make our lives spiritually rich. Regardless of whether one is materialistically successful or not, or highly educated or not, I think that if each individual can truly feel that he or she is carrying out a mission, whatever it may be, that person will feel permanent happiness. Even if one succeeds materialistically, there is no end to materialistic greed and, therefore, the sense of fulfillment fades after a little while, making one simply jealous of people who are more successful. And without a doubt, jealousy makes people unhappy. However poor or unhappy in family life, or without high education, to be blessed is the person who has a mission to carry out with responsibility, regardless of the outcome.

N. Haraoka



Painter: Tiziano Vecello (1490-1576)

Title: Sisyphus, 1548 - 1549

Technique: Oil on canvas

Museum/Location: Prado Museum, Madrid, Spain

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