

ECHOING GOD'S WORD
in
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
Third Sunday of Lent
March 7, 2021

SCRIPTURES READINGS:

Exodus 20:1-17	God's law leads us to freedom.
1 Corinthians 1:22-25	Jesus is the sign of God's wisdom and power.
John 2:13-25	His resurrection is our ultimate freedom.

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the Scriptures carefully, beginning with the Gospel. Take a few minutes in silence to hear the Lord speaking to the heart. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the Church community. What does God want the community to hear today?

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

John:

John relocates the story of the cleansing of the Temple from the time toward the end of Jesus' ministry, as the other three Gospels have it, to a time at the beginning of the ministry. In the Synoptics, the story functions as a prelude to the final showdown between Jesus and the Temple authorities. John would have us see the raising of Lazarus as that event that caused the ultimate rejection of Jesus by the authorities. He introduces some elements not found in the Temple cleansing as we have it in the Synoptics. Here, Jesus makes a whip out of cords and addresses the dove sellers separately. In John's account, Jesus does not overturn their tables. John speaks of sheep and oxen being sold in the Temple also.

The point of the story here is the proclamation by Jesus of his future resurrection. The Temple becomes the sign of his human life on earth. Surely, the Temple authorities were outraged and deeply offended by this allusion. There was nothing as sacred as the Temple. How could he blasphemously make that connection: his life equivalent to or even superior to the Temple?

We do not find in John's Gospel what we see in the Synoptics: a parallel between Jesus and the disciples. The body of Jesus, which will be destroyed in crucifixion and death, only to be raised to new life in resurrection, is not made the model for the "body of believers," or for the Church community, as we would find it in the other Gospels and in Paul. For John, Jesus is so utterly unique and exalted that his body is not used as an image for the Church which will have to suffer also.

Scripture here is presented as also including the words spoken by Jesus. In John 20:9, we hear Jesus saying that the disciples had not yet believed in *Scripture* which had announced that he would die and rise again. There, *Scripture* obviously refers back to this Verse 22 in Chapter 2.

Exodus:

Catholics need to remember that the way we number the Ten Commandments is not the same as Protestants do. When we refer to the Sixth Commandment (adultery), Protestants think we are talking about committing murder! In the Bible, the commandments are not numbered. We have our own tradition as to how we separate them and enumerate them.

Protestants separate out the First Commandment into two and join our ninth and tenth into one. It causes confusion when we refer to commandments by numbers. The Law of Moses, especially in the values represented by the Ten Commandments, brings order and respect into the social order. People are never as free as when they are respectful of God and of other people. Happiness and personal fulfillment come only when we are in a right relationship with God and with one another. The commandments are given to Israel, and to us, as an act of love and mercy on God's part. God allows us to choose freedom by choosing to live according to the goals for which we have been created.

Corinthians:

The paradox of the cross, a crucified Christ who was raised to life, stands at the heart of our faith commitment. It seems absurd to those who do not believe. In it is to be found the most profound wisdom for those who have experienced its effect and its power in their lives. When we demand miracles from the Lord, we disclose our unwillingness to see the truth in God's judgment and in the wisdom of God's decisions, says Paul. We want things to be on our terms, to happen according to our standards and desires. Paul points to the cross of Christ, his death and resurrection, to show that God operates by different standards.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Is it really a sign of the inadequacy of our faith when we beg God for a miracle? Is it true that we must always accept whatever our lot is in life and never seek to change it? Is it wrong to ask God to heal us when we are sick or to ask for the healing of someone we love? Does faith require that we forgo any improvement in our physical wellbeing? Since Jesus says that his resurrection is the only sign worth seeking, must we conclude that it is sinful to seek other signs?

2. Have you ever hesitated to ask God for a favor for yourself? Do you sometimes try to disguise your personal need by asking God only indirectly, for the wellbeing of someone you love, for example? When did you finally decide that you could and should pray for yourself also? What brought you to that decision? How can you relate your own wellbeing to the resurrection of Christ being made real in your life?

3. Do you often think of the Ten Commandments as an expression of God's merciful love? Were you brought up to view the commandments as freedom giving? Are you now able to accept the commandments of God as a gift that will bring you happiness if you observe them faithfully? Discuss some example of the bondage that results from repeated violations of the commandments.

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Ask your family or your faith-sharing group to help you decide on some practical endeavor by which you will cleanse your life of the "marketplace" atmosphere that it may have become by neglecting prayer.

PRAYING TOGETHER

"Zeal for your house consumes me."

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

I have been told that when the Lectionary of the Catholic Church was being prepared after the Second Vatican Council, a compromise had to be agreed on between different suggestions for the lessons to be proclaimed during the Sundays of Lent. The most ancient and customary tradition for the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays was to proclaim the "Woman at the Well," the "Man Born Blind," and the "Raising of Lazarus." For centuries, the faith community had been formed and re-formed by these stories of conversion, baptism, and new birth. Why not just give one cycle for these three Sundays and use the same texts every year? Others, not so impressed by the tradition, urged two other sets of lessons for years B and C in order to expand the offerings and to promote a broader knowledge of Scripture. The compromise was to offer all three, with a clear option and even a preference for the lessons of Cycle A. In fact, when there are catechumens in the community, the use of Cycle A is mandatory.

During Year B, which we observe this year, the Church gives us lessons from John's Gospel. These lessons point us to the power and effect of Christ's glorification through death and resurrection. If your parish uses only the lessons from Cycle A, which I think is always to be preferred, nevertheless you may want to read and reflect on the lessons from Year B privately for your own spiritual enrichment.

St. Ambrose says that there are two waters associated with conversion: the waters of baptism, for the "First and Initial Conversion," and the waters of tears for repentance in reconversion after having sinned. The image of water as a symbol of new life and of refreshment in our parched existence reminds us of our baptism and of its renewal each time we sincerely repent of our sins.

I like to think of the holy water with which we bless ourselves each time we enter the church building as a renewal of baptism, as a way of expressing our need for forgiveness again. Each time we use holy water, we need to remember our re-conversion, our repentance for sin, our need for God's mercy in the love of Christ. The flowing fountains of water at the entrances to our church buildings are powerful signs that we have found new life, and continually find refreshment, in the Holy Spirit which binds us to Christ again and again throughout our lives.

See: The Catechism of the Catholic Church: #1427-1429, 1668
The Lectionary, Introduction: # 10, 13, etc.

©2014 Rev. Clement D. Thibodeau. All rights reserved.