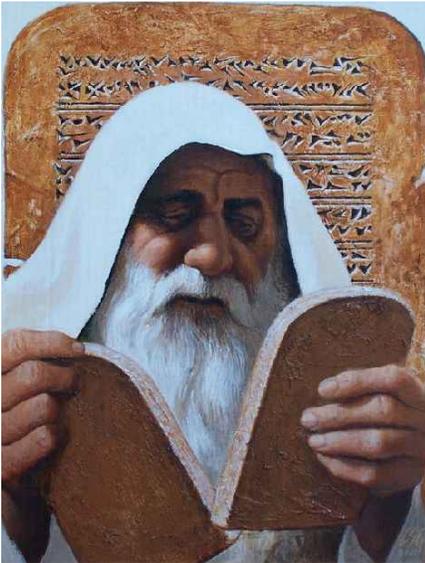


Lectionary Faith-Sharing Community

3RD SUNDAY OF LENT

Cycle B - March 7, 2021

OPENING PRAYER



Guide: *Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.*

All: **Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God, my savior.**

Leader: Remember that your compassion, O Lord, and your love are from old.

All: **In your kindness remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord.**

Guide: *We invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit:*

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send, Lord your spirit and renew the face of the earth.

Oh God, that you have instructed the hearts of your faithful with the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us through the same spirit that always enjoy her divine consolation. By Christ, our Lord. Amen.

FIRST READING [Exodus 20 (1-17)]

In those days, God delivered all these commandments:

“I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods besides me. You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or worship them. For I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their fathers’ wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation; but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments.

“You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain. For the Lord will not leave unpunished the one who takes his name in vain.

“Remember to keep holy the sabbath day. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord, your God. No work may be done then either by you, or your son or daughter, or your male or female slave, or your beast, or by the alien who lives with you. In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord has blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

“Honor your father and your mother, that you may have a long life in the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you.

You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass, nor anything else that belongs to him.”

Let us remember that we are in Lent and for 5 Sundays (in the first reading) we will go over the Plan of God, or the History of Salvation. In the previous Sundays we read the first two covenants of God with his people: First through Noah and then through Abraham. We see the third stage of this history of salvation at the moment when, through Moses, God makes a third covenant, which is now manifested in the form of a detailed law. Men already knows what he is supposed to do as a counterpart of that alliance with Yahweh. They have now the Decalogue.

The ten commandments - which are rather almost all prohibitions - are universally known, which does not mean that they are practiced. It would be interesting to try to rank them, put them in order according to the importance that each one gives to them. We know that they refer to our vertical obligations (to God, the first three) and our horizontal responsibilities (to our neighbor, the remaining seven). They all move within a limit that could be explained with this sentence: "Do not turn away from God and do not harm man."

The Decalogue is the essence of the covenant, the great communal law of love for God and neighbor. Judaism will exaggerate the legal and external aspect of the law and will reduce it to mere compliance, to the accumulation of acts compatible with dictated rules. They came to forget that the covenant meant something else; it is a gift and response of love. This explains why God sent prophets with messages that resemble the love between husband and wife, between parents and children.

The book of Exodus highlights that God is the one who takes the initiative to liberate his people (from slavery) and make an covenant with them: It is about forming a people of free people who serve and recognize not the superiority or sovereignty of another man but of Yahweh-God. That is why the Decalogue begins with the affirmation of God as the only Lord of the people. Yahweh-God is the Lord of time and history, He is the creator and liberator Lord.

(1) In recent times we have seen that in the face of a tragedy of violence by bloodshed, some have proposed that monuments be erected showing the ten commandments. Is this a good idea? Why?

(2) Read Jeremiah 31 (31-33). What guarantees that men keep the commandments? That they are known? The fear of punishment for disobedience? Loving God so much that you don't want to offend him?

(3) After answering this question, would we need to review our answers to the first question?

(4) Read Matthew 5 (21-22). Is it necessary to commit a crime to break this commandment? What is the "spirit of the Law" that Jesus Christ wants us to understand?

(5) Try to discover other sins against the Fifth Commandment.

SECOND READING [1 Corinthians 1 (22-25)]

Brothers and sisters:

Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Paul never tires of repeating that salvation is the product of God's initiative. Men, depending on their culture, seek to understand this mystery. The Jews, in order to accept God's salvation, need signs or miracles, because their ancestors had been witnesses and beneficiaries of spectacular signs. The Messiah had to be a glorious man who would show his strength by rebuilding the power of Israel, and instead, Paul introduces them to a weak man who ended up hanging on a cross. On the other hand, the Greeks valued any idea according to sound reason, and they find in Paul's preaching something as irrational as the idea of the resurrection.

The crucified Messiah clashes both with the mentality of the former ("a scandal") and with that of the latter ("a foolishness"), because the work of salvation does not start with men. But Paul is discovering that in spite of everything, both Jews and Gentiles are opening up to divine illumination. Paul sees in this an act of God, which is made known precisely in Christ crucified, which for men could seem a weakness and an absurdity.

Paul concludes by suggesting that God had revealed himself through creation, but men did not use the wisdom that God has given them to understand such revelation. For this reason, God has no other recourse than to appeal to the bizarre, to what human wisdom will qualify as madness or foolishness: the cross.

(1) Read Matthew 12 (38-40). Do you know Christians of our time who are looking for miraculous signs to feed their faith? What do you think is more useful to enrich faith: miracles or reading the Word of God?

(2) We live in a world in which values are upset. Give examples of Christian values that worldly people may take for an absurd idea.

(3) Once the previous question has been answered, what is the Christian's commitment to sanctify the world? What help should it receive?

GOSPEL [John 2 (13-25)]

Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the money changers seated there. He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables, and to those who sold doves he said, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace." His disciples recalled the words of Scripture, Zeal for your house will consume me. At this the Jews answered and said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the Scripture and the word Jesus had spoken. While he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing. But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all, and did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well.

We should not allow the anecdotal (the expulsion of the merchants) to distract us from the theological content of this reading. We find a kind of contradiction, when Jesus first wants to rescue the dignity of the place, but later on, he downplays that place by comparing it with his own body. Jesus' attitude may seem exaggerated, but apparently this vice had been creeping up on for a long time. Zechariah (14:21) many years before Christ already denounced the situation. But more than purifying the temple, Jesus wanted to draw attention to launch his proclamation in which he wishes to reveal that the temple "of his body" would become more important than that stone structure.

We read in the second reading that Jews needed to see signs to believe. Here we see an example of that way of thinking, because instead of arresting him for all the scandal caused, what they do is demand a sign that shows what he is saying. And they do it because for them the temple was a visible sign of the presence of God in the midst of the people. But a few days later, after not having recognized the God that they intend to keep locked up in the temple, who speaks to them and wants to reveal the truth to them, they will ask for his death. So Jesus does give them a powerful sign: his own resurrection, which is the highest expression of God's glory. The death of Jesus will not mean, as it had happened when the temple was destroyed, that God "is no longer present", but rather a replacement by the glorious body of the Risen One, a sanctuary in which the fullness of the Holy Spirit dwells.

We are in cycle B, and the passages of the Gospel that we hear in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th. Sunday of Lent present us with a very special teaching. Next Sunday, we will read the episode with Nicodemus, the introduction of which is precisely the last verses of today's Gospel. Without wanting to anticipate the reflection that we will do, that conversation with Nicodemus clarifies many things and leaves us several ideas to take advantage of. Later the Sunday that follows, we will read an episode in which some Gentiles (not Jews) approach one of the apostles to get to know Jesus, who responds with a speech that is very rich in explanations of the meaning of his mission.

Two weeks ago we read that Jesus proposed that the new should not be mixed with the old. Something similar is what he intends to teach in the temple: Men were used to relating to God through a building, some rites and a law. But now, all that is no longer valid. From now on, the way to relate to God is through the risen Jesus Christ. Jesus is the temple, the meeting point. If Jesus is the Temple, those who join Jesus by faith form the same temple with him. The material church is no longer for Christians the "house of God" but the house of the people of God. To think otherwise would be to return to the religious conception that Jesus Christ wanted to change. True worship does not take place in material spaces, but in any place where men live faith and charity.

{The following quotes from the Gospels contain an allusion to the requirement of signs and signals in order to believe: John (3: 2); (4:48); (6:14); (6:30); Matthew (12:38); (16: 1); Mark (8:11); Luke (11: 6)}



- (1) Read Jeremiah 7 (1-11). In what way is the figure of God in a temple disrespected?
- (2) Is the temple the only place where God may be offended?
- (3) What can we say about those who behave very well in a temple but do what they want outside of it? Is keeping respect in a temple important or the most important thing to our faith?
- (4) Read the last paragraph again. What is inside of you that men do not know, but that God can see and that needs to be improved? What part of you needs to be broken down to be lifted back up?

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord of the day and night, of the beginning and of the end: At the closing of this meeting, once again we lift up our hearts to You, divine source of all life.*

All: **We thank you for the gifts you have bestowed on us. We thank you for the love expressed in companionship and understanding, mutual respect and shared ideas. We give you thanks for your holy power that will help us in our concerns that we have shared. For these and all the gifts that come from You, we give you thanks.**

Leader: *Lord hear our prayers* (attendees can propose their own needs of prayer)

All: **In the same way in which we have being blessed by your presence as we meet, we ask now to bless our safe return to our homes. May your holy blessing be over us + in the name of the Father ...**

Leader: *May the King of the eternal glory gather us together in His heavenly banquet. Amen.*

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