

January 21, 2003, Feast of St. Agnes

Heb 6:10-20, Mk 2:23-28

May we remember St. Agnes, a girl of 12 in the 4th Century and her heroic Christian witness in the midst of terrible torture.

The letter to the Hebrews is a good pep talk. God acknowledges the good works of love that we do for each other. Hebrews connects us to the promise God made to Abraham, that we are His people. We can take peace and comfort from that, even as we are encouraged to continue in our loving actions.

God's promise can be relied on. What has God promised you? Do you ever doubt it? Do you ever feel that through some actions of yours that God will withdraw his promise? Believe me, Abraham's descendants have done everything imaginable in rejecting God, yet the Scripture assures us that God's promise is enduring. It is something to hope and rely on.

This promise is more clearly seen in Jesus as our high priest. Jesus has reconciled us to God, now and forever.

While Hebrews is our message of hope, Mark provides us with a great life lesson. This is another story of how Jesus illuminates the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

Jesus and his disciples are picking from standing grain on the Sabbath. The current law allowed people to pick and eat from neighbors' fields. It was doing it on the Sabbath that contradicted Jewish observances.

Jesus first demonstrated that there was historical precedent with David, but the real problem was with the way the Pharisees saw their relationship with God and the Law.

The Pharisees, who are clinging to the letter of the law, have lost sight of what God gave us in the Sabbath. The Sabbath is God's blessing to us. It provides rest, a time-out from life's struggles so that we can experience God and come to understand what life is for. It's not something else on our to-do list, just another obligation, that satisfied, somehow makes us righteous.

Many times we can see our actions in the Church to be like that of the Pharisees. The Pharisees worked pretty hard to "catch" Jesus messing up. I mean did they follow him into the field to spy on him? Can you remember when you ever tried that hard to find something wrong with another? How do we criticize others who are not following Church norms to the letter? Christians of traditions different than ours? Jews and Muslims who also worship the God of Abraham? Of others who do not know God as He has revealed Himself to us?

God's promise can be relied on. Can we be relied on to treat each other with the love and compassion that God shows us?