

Readings for the 21st Tuesday of the Year

FIRST READING: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians:

You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our reception among you was not without effect. Rather, after we had suffered and been insolently treated, as you know, in Philippi, we drew courage through our God to speak to you the Gospel of God with much struggle. Our exhortation was not from delusion or impure motives, nor did it work through deception. But as we were judged worthy by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, that is how we speak, not as trying to please men, but rather God, who judges our hearts. Nor, indeed, did we ever appear with flattering speech, as you know, or with a pretext for greed—God is witness—nor did we seek praise from men, either from you or from others, although we were able to impose our weight as Apostles of Christ. Rather, we were gentle among you, as a nursing mother cares for her children. With such affection for you, we were determined to share with you not only the Gospel of God, but our very selves as well, so dearly beloved had you become to us.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 139:1-3, 4-6

You have searched me and you know me, Lord.

O LORD, you have probed me and you know me; you know when I sit and when I stand; you understand my thoughts from afar. My journeys and my rest you scrutinize, with all my ways you are familiar.

You have searched me and you know me, Lord.

Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know the whole of it. Behind me and before, you hem me in and rest your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; too lofty for me to attain.

You have searched me and you know me, Lord.

Gospel: Matthew 23:23-26

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

Jesus said: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity. But these you should have done, without neglecting the others. Blind guides, who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel! "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 21st Tuesday of the Year

Psalm 139 is one of my favorites. It presents one of the greatest enigmas. God knows me better than I know myself. God knows my faults and my deepest sin. What is God's response to this? God loves and forgives me. God has gifted me with life, faith, family, friends and a meaningful life. God knows my prayer before I pray. Why and to what end? Each of us comes from God. Each of us lives life with God being part of us. When we die, we return to God.

We travel a full circle; from where we came and with whom we have lived. God knows us as God's beloved sons and daughters. God hopes that we will be transformed into the people God wants us to become. We are people that God knows with much intimacy. God seeks us to be as

intimate with God and with others. God sees God reflected in each of us. We can see God reflected in everyone we meet. We can also experience God within ourselves.

Having established this as a baseline for God's relationship with us all, Paul has spoken about the difficulties that he and the community in Thessalonica has faced. Life is not always a picnic. If it is, there are always ants and rain. When he was rejected in Philippi, the Thessalonians accepted him. Despite Paul's failure in another town, he found the strength to try once more. Not only did Paul proclaim the gospel, he had to read it, listen to it and incorporate its message to heal his trauma. We don't usually think of these great saints facing the same frustrations we do. We don't read Paul to see his goodness but to be filled as he was by the goodness of God.

Through Paul's work, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus, the grace of God provided the life saving grace for Paul. Through Paul's relationship to the Church in Thessalonica, God sustained both the missionary and the congregation. The bond of love that rooted them was, indeed, the infinite, eternal and unconditional love of God. Paul invoked the image of a nursing mother with her babies to describe the mutual relationship of Paul and the community. They were wrapped in God's love. The sharing of God's gifts between them sustained them all, together. This is what also binds us and keeps us faithful in Christ as the Church.

There's a knee-jerk reaction I always have when Jesus speaks so harshly about people. Thank God I'm not a Pharisee or a scribe. I try to check that mistake as I remember how Paul spoke about sinners. He would call himself the first and foremost sinner. As soon as any delight about Jesus calling out a particular group of sinners begins to surface, I judge them. Better them than me is the most human of behaviors. It is not the way Jesus has intended for his followers to respond. Jesus' words this morning are meant for me, who is also, like Paul the first and foremost of sinners.

Jesus' call to faith, repentance and conversion is never meant for people who never read or hear him. It is always for us who do. Jesus spoke to each of us today. He has given us an opportunity, as we heard his words, to examine our own lives, to see our own sidestepping and insincerity about the gospel. As human beings, we can get caught up in our own pettiness, hypocrisy and self-indulgence. If we who are faithful don't heed Jesus words, who will? There's no one else.

Paul found God's grace in his work, people and the gospel. The mere gathering of the community to share God's word deepened the relationships between then and with God. This is the same gift Jesus offers us as we gather each morning. When we hear God's word and share the Body of Christ we can know God who shares life within, among and through us. When we finish mass we leave to bring what we celebrated and received into the world as we witness to Jesus by what we do and say. We continue the mission of Paul.

May the Lord continue to fill our lives as we strive for the fulfillment of God's Kingdom.

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