

Readings for Thursday the 27th Week of the Year

FIRST READING: Galatians 3:1-5

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians:

O stupid Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? I want to learn only this from you: did you receive the Spirit from works of the law, or from faith in what you heard? Are you so stupid? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so many things in vain?— if indeed it was in vain. Does, then, the one who supplies the Spirit to you and works mighty deeds among you do so from works of the law or from faith in what you heard?

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Luke 1:69-70, 71-72, 73-75

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people.

He has raised up for us a mighty savior, born of the house of his servant David.

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people.

Through his holy prophets he promised of old that he would save us from our enemies, from the hands of all who hate us.

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people.

He promised to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant.

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people.

This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to set us free from the hands of our enemies, free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life.

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people.

Gospel:

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke 11:5-13

Jesus said to his disciples: "Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him,' and he says in reply from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked and my children and I are already in bed. I cannot get up to give you anything.' I tell you, if he does not get up to give him the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence. "And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then, who are wicked,

know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for Thursday the 27th Week of the Year

On Tuesday, Paul wrote about his conversion. His journey to Christ began, by God's intent, before he was born. His Christian faith and mission to the Church was a gift. His transformation from a bounty hunter and one who persecuted the believers in Jesus was a sign of God's Providence. Today we hear Paul calling the Galatian Church stupid and bewitched. I was taught by the School Sisters of St. Frances in grammar school. We learned two things, if nothing else, from them. Water fountains are called bubblers and stupidity is willful ignorance. Paul used the word stupid with just that meaning. Here is the question they faced. How does God save us? In this passage, there are two possible answers. We are saved by following the law, by what we say and do. This is the first. Our actions good or bad save or condemn us. This is the second. God's eternal and unconditional love saves us. Salvation is God's gift. It is unearned and unwarranted. Our behavior is based upon the grace that God gives us. Our choices of doing good gives witness to our faith. Turning to God in our sins reflects God's mercy. The reason Paul told them his story of conversion and transformation was to show the second answer. Turning from his former persecution of Christians and turning to Jesus and his Church shows God's unexpected and amazing grace. Paul had a theological point. We follow the law and do good because Jesus died on the cross for us. It is Jesus not the law that is our salvation.

We work hard for our money. We earn our wages. The world works because we work. Everything has a cause and effect. This pattern is imbedded in our lives. God doesn't work that way. None of us had a choice in being born. No one chooses their family, ethnicity or first language. Our uniqueness is seemingly random. God is like us in Jesus, but as the eternal and unconditional lover, God is completely other. God has guided all the things that have made us. We are alive today and the people we have become by God's providence. What saves us is our faith in God and in the one God sent, Jesus. Faith in Jesus is God's gift. Choosing God's gifts is also God's gift. For the Galatians, and possibly ourselves, this doesn't fit our experience of how the world works.

God and God's saving grace are mysteries. The word gospel, after some etymological investigation, means good news. Condemnation, sin and death are bad news. Having to earn or win God's love is something we cannot do for we will never deserve those things. This is more bad news. Here's the good news, the message of the gospel. God is love. God is merciful, compassionate and forgiving. God freely offers these things to us. Jesus won these for us by his death. Jesus also rose from the dead on Easter and won for us the promise of eternal life and resurrection. These are gifts we do not deserve, make or earn. God gives them to us. They are his gift or grace. The thanks we to offer God is also God's gift to us.

Paul tried to teach and preach the good news of God's grace. His words were sharp, stupidity and bewitchment. He tried to get their attention. Since we still believe what Paul taught and take the gospel to heart, it seems he succeeded, by the grace of God. We believe too, by the

grace of God. We entrust those, to whom God's gift of faith has not yet come, to God's loving providence. God works in God's time, not ours.

Jesus' parables in today's gospel are curious. There seems to be three. There's the reluctant, secure and sleepy friend who lives next door. There's the admonition to seek, ask and knock. This allows us to receive, find and have doors opened for us. The third is the father who knows to offer a fish and egg and not a snake and scorpion to his children. Each of them is different and has a similar but unique insight. Matthew joined them together by comparing us to God. We can provide what is good to each other but God will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.

What is the lesson of the first story? Do we pester God until we get what we need or want like the man did to his neighbor? We're all praying for an effective treatment and a viable vaccine against COVID 19. We all want an end to prejudice and bigotry. We pray for God to heal all those with the disease. We also pray to win the lottery. Just a glance at the front page of the newspaper or a couple minutes listening to or watching the news tells us how near we are for these prayers to be fulfilled. What did the man do? He turned to someone else for help. Perhaps the resolution of the request is not the point of the parable. Perhaps it is the act of turning, expressing need and asking another in and of itself the point. These offer the possibility of finding resolution to the pressing problems.

If, as Paul says in his letters is true, every thing is a gift or grace from God, even the people we can't stand, the most painful of events and, for those who do not like them, Brussels sprouts are God's gifts too. The chaotic world in which we live with its violence, ignorance and pain is God's gift. What is our response to these things? Don't we try to have compassion? Don't we wear our masks in public, keep effective distance between us and wash our hands? Don't we support, as a parish, the food pantry of St. Eulalia? Don't we try to love our neighbor as we love ourselves and God? We, ourselves can be God's answer to our prayers. God works through you and me. We are the means through whom God's word and grace can enter our world. Jesus in the second parable tells us this. We ask, seek, and knock. This is the way God calls us to action. We receive, find and open doors in answer to our turning to God in the first place. Our witness to faith is the means of God's providence.

The third parable is about conscience. God's gift of faith gives us many gifts. We know the right things to do. We can tell good from bad. We know the difference between what can help or hurt. Eggs and fish provide nourishment. A scorpion stings and a snake can bite. We know that there is only one human race. Each human being is created by God in God's own image and likeness. By faith in Jesus we know brotherhood, fellowship and community. Each of us, through Jesus is a daughter or son of God. We believe that as God's beloved children we are brothers and sisters of Jesus and all other of God's children. What is our conscience? It is the way God speaks to us. God lets us know right from wrong. Through our consciences we give God witness.

Matthew combined these three parables together. With his closing line we find out why. The point to the pestering, asking, seeking, knocking and giving is to receive the Holy Spirit. This is Matthew's vision of faith. This is how he ends the gospel, "Jesus came near and said to them: 'Full authority in heaven and on earth has been committed to me. Go therefore to all nations

and make them my disciples; baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. I will be with you always, to the end of time.'” We carry on Jesus’ mission. God’s Spirit enters the world through us who believe.

The cross of Jesus saved us. The rising of Jesus gave us the promise of eternal life. Faith in Jesus changed Paul. It has changed us as well. God gives us many gifts that have brought us to this day. We turn to God and one another for help and guidance. God’s help is surprising. God’s help flows through you and me.

May God guide your steps, strengthen your heart and lead you to give witness to faith.

James D. Beath
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