

Readings for Tuesday the First Week of the Year

FIRST READING: Hebrews 2:5-12

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews:

It was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. Instead, someone has testified somewhere: *What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor, subjecting all things under his feet.* In “subjecting” all things to him, he left nothing not “subject to him.” Yet at present we do not see “all things subject to him,” but we do see Jesus “crowned with glory and honor” because he suffered death, he who “for a little while” was made “lower than the angels,” that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering. He who consecrates and those who are being consecrated all have one origin. Therefore, he is not ashamed to call them “brothers” saying: *I will proclaim your name to my brethren, in the midst of the assembly I will praise you.*

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 8:2ab and 5, 6-7, 8-9

You have given your Son rule over the works of your hands.

O LORD, our Lord, how glorious is your name over all the earth! What is man that you should be mindful of him, or the son of man that you should care for him?

You have given your Son rule over the works of your hands.

You have made him little less than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him rule over the works of your hands, putting all things under his feet.

You have given your Son rule over the works of your hands.

All sheep and oxen, yes, and the beasts of the field, The birds of the air, the fishes of the sea, and whatever swims the paths of the seas.

You have given your Son rule over the works of your hands.

Gospel: Mark 1:21-28

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark:

Jesus came to Capernaum with his followers, and on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” Jesus rebuked him and said, “Quiet! Come out of him!” The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him. All were amazed and asked one another, “What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.” His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for Tuesday the First Week of the Year

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews is most likely not Paul. The style, language and content may have some similarities but the differences are too great for Paul to have been the author. The scriptural quotes are all from the Old Testament, Psalm 8. The original context was God’s vision for the entire human race. The context of the Letter to the Hebrews is one

man, Jesus. God created humans in God's image and likeness, but human nature is flawed. It is God who makes us more than we are, seeing who we can become. Hebrews sees Jesus as the one already gifted, being fully God, with that state. The author made a point that God chose to be born a human being, taking upon himself human flaws, pain and sin. Jesus suffered and died the death of a criminal. His execution by crucifixion was the result of his choice to be one like us.

Salvation is ours because Jesus won it for us through his sacrifice. Instead of people offering sacrifices to God, God sacrificed God for human sin. No one can add or give anything new to God. God has made all things and is the source of all love. Instead of us giving anything to God, God gave and gives us all; God's life, love and forgiveness. Through Jesus, God has made us God's children, beloved and redeemed. Jesus has made us his brothers and sisters, siblings with him and heirs of God's kingdom.

This is the doctrine or content of faith of Jesus. We can memorize it and recite it. What does it mean though? Each of us can ask, "Who is Jesus to me?" What is our personal commitment in faith? How has Jesus touched you and me? The language of the doctrine is of relationships; with God to us, us to God and one another. The context of the relationships is love. The source of love is God. God is eternal, infinite and unconditional; God is love. God's love is that same as God. What impact does that make on us and the way we live? Even when we sin, God's love remains and perhaps, because of our greater need, becomes deepened and strengthened. God desires a deeper relationship with us and one another. When ever we gather together, because we believe, Jesus us in our midst. Whenever we gather together, God proclaims praise for and with us.

Knowing this can change our perception of our prayer, worship together as the Church and family life. The very fabric of our identity is transformed by our faith in Jesus. We can always see, hear and interpret our experience of living through our perspective of faith. We can also catch a glimpse of our destiny within the Kingdom of God. We can experience a bit of what is to come, now.

Some years ago, one of my friends and classmates gave a lesson to a class of eighth graders. His lesson was on God's love. He brought in a traditional framed picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He asked the class if they knew what it was. No one answered. He persisted in prodding the kids. Finally one of the boys raised his hand and answered, "It's the Sacred Heart." My friend was delighted and felt that his lesson could now strike home. However, as a fellow priest and more significantly as fellow human being, fell prey to our human condition. He proceeded to seize defeat from the jaws of victory. He asked the kid, "Can you describe the picture's content?" This was the traditional image of the Sacred Heart. The boy then said, "Jesus has ripped his beating heart out of his own chest and while his foot is crushing the devil's skull, aims a death ray out of his heart to disintegrate Satan." He was horrified. Personally, I have never found any comfort from that picture. The thirteen-year-old encapsulated all my unease with the image.

This happened right after I went on retreat at the Jesuit Retreat Center in Oshkosh Wisconsin. It is located on the southern shores of Lake Winnebago. A friend of mine had preceded me on retreat the year before. My friend recommended that I stop in to pray in the Chapel to the Sacred Heart. Given my discomfort with the traditional image, I was reluctant. I did stop in, twice, while on retreat. I am grateful for that friendly recommendation. There was a statue of the Sacred Heart that I did not anticipate. I was moved at its depiction.

I include a photo of it with this reflection. Jesus sits and holds a young child. Jesus' beard is neatly trimmed and has a good haircut. One of his hands rests on his lap and holds the child's hand. The young child, who can be a boy or girl, stands at his knee and snuggles on Jesus' shoulder. Jesus' other arm holds the child close. It is a moving and beautiful image. I had intended for one brief visit. I spent hours twice. I became carried away and almost missed lunch the first time and dinner the second, lost in an experience of prayer. The image conveyed peace, intimacy and tenderness. The kid's story was violent and



disturbing. This new image presented God's unconditional love to me.

When we approach Christian living without consideration of God's love, we lose our perspective of faith. We will seek the destruction of evil and not forgiveness of evil. We seek punishment and retribution for sinners and not forgiveness, mercy and redemption. We base our behavior on guilt and shame and turn God's Good News into bad news. Today's story of Jesus becomes the kid's description of the Sacred Heart picture. Jesus did not come to kill the devil. Jesus came to save the human race. We have received, through God's gift of faith in Jesus, forgiveness and the promise of eternal life. Jesus responded to a man, not a monster. This scene is from the gospel, not the Exorcist. It is Jesus teaching and healing that spoke powerfully to the people in the synagogue of Capernaum. Jesus' Word brought faith and transformed the man. People witnessed healing and forgiveness of the man's thoughtless outburst.

Their question, "What is this?" is an important question we can ask as we attempt to process the senseless and chaotic events and behavior of our time. We can stop and reflect, too, like they did to make sense out of what we see. God has transformed us as we have known God's unconditional love. God forgives our sin. God uses our faults, weaknesses and sin to draw us closer to him and one another. God merely asks that we do our best to share these gifts with those we meet. It is a simple thing to show others kindness and the benefit of the doubt.

Jesus gave us one command, love; love God, self, others and enemies. Jesus command is firmly based upon God, who is love. God has first loved each of us. The Jesuit way to pray the scriptures is for one to place one's self into the story as one of the characters. I began my prayer in preparation of this reflection by assuming the role of the man who spoke out against Jesus. What thought, feelings and behavior do I have that needs to be purged, changed and healed? What in my life needs God's loving transformation? What baggage do I carry? Do I hear a new teaching? In this approach, I can discern the Good News at work. God changes us, not our surroundings. We, then, can affect our surroundings by our witness of faith.

May God grant you patience, strength, and good health. May you give witness to God's gifts as you keep others safe.

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