

Readings for the 26th Tuesday of the Year

FIRST READING: Zechariah 8:20-23

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Zechariah:

Thus says the LORD of hosts: There shall yet come peoples, the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one city shall approach those of another, and say, "Come! let us go to implore the favor of the LORD"; and, "I too will go to seek the LORD." Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to implore the favor of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men of every nationality, speaking different tongues, shall take hold, yes, take hold of every Jew by the edge of his garment and say, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 87:1b-3, 4-5, 6-7

God is with us.

His foundation upon the holy mountains the LORD loves: The gates of Zion, more than any dwelling of Jacob. Glorious things are said of you, O city of God!

God is with us.

I tell of Egypt and Babylon among those that know the LORD; Of Philistia, Tyre, Ethiopia: "This man was born there." And of Zion they shall say: "One and all were born in her; And he who has established her is the Most High LORD."

God is with us.

They shall note, when the peoples are enrolled: "This man was born there." And all shall sing, in their festive dance: "My home is within you."

God is with us.

Gospel: Luke 9:51-56

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

When the days for Jesus to be taken up were fulfilled, he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem, and he sent messengers ahead of him. On the way they entered a Samaritan village to prepare for his reception there, but they would not welcome him because the destination of his journey was Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?" Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they journeyed to another village.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 26th Tuesday of the Year

Context is always important to understand the scriptures. Who Zechariah was is not as important as when and where he was born. He was a Jew born in exile in the Babylonian Empire. He was a child of the Diaspora. He was also one of the remnant of Israel who returned

to his ancestral home in Judah. He returned to Jerusalem. This is the crucial part of his story. Without the Diaspora, no one outside of Judah would have been exposed to the Faith of Israel. The worship of God would have remained native to the area of Palestine. Because the inhabitants of Judah were scattered around the Babylonian Empire, many pagans became familiar with Jewish ways, customs and, most importantly, God. Zechariah's prophetic vision of Jerusalem's establishment of a world-wide religious hub and the Jewish Faith as a magnet for people seeking God would be a pipedream without the Diaspora.

However, as compelling the vision is, it never materialized in Zechariah's context. Pagan people were not drawn in high numbers to the Jewish faith and way of life. Jewishness is both ethnic, that is hereditary, and religious. One may convert to Judaism and adopt Jewish ways and culture but never be able to become ethnically a Jew. We do know that many people did convert to Judaism as a religion. People still do, Sammy Davis and Anne Meara have been two prominent people who converted in the last century. Zechariah's vision was only a reality after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. People flocked to believe in the risen Jesus in a post Easter and post Pentecost world. Christianity, not Judaism, can be seen as his prophesy being fulfilled.

This only sounds good on paper. I have lived in parishes divided by ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences. Many parishes have masses in more than one language. Rarely do their members see themselves as one in Christ. They see themselves as rival, separate communities. Instead of seeing the Eucharist as their common rite, rarely does anyone venture to attend the mass in another language. The Word of God proclaimed by God's prophet, Zechariah, we, those from many nations, languages and cultures, ignore. We divide what God has joined. Why?

My heritage is mainly German. Two sets of my grandparents came here from Germanic countries in Europe. During the last century, we Americans fought two wars against Germany. During WWI and WWII it was un-American to speak German in public. When I was a kid, I would hear German-speaking adults, in public, speaking English with each other in heavy German accents. German disappeared from my family within a generation. To become American meant to become an Anglophile. My father's mother never learned her prayers in English, though she never spoke German. My mother's father was born in the Old Country, came to America as a baby and never learned the language of his parents. My great grandparents spoke German between themselves as a secret code so their kids couldn't understand and overhear them.

I had classmates, in high school who were of Polish and Italian descent. When I visited them in their homes, they would speak to each other in their native tongues, which I could not understand. I had only ever experienced the Germans who struggled to speak English. I had understood the reason to be out of courtesy for others that they did it, not the history behind it. German had disappeared within a generation for us. Ancestral languages in other ethnicities without such history can take at least three Generations for English to eclipse the original. It has happened for most. There is considerable pressure for English speaking dominance. Each immigrant group goes through the process. We can resent each subsequent group. It is only Jesus who makes us one. Do we let him?

God is with us, today's response. I maintain that this is the true blessing of God. A blessing makes one Holy. I like to point out that, as far as I know, only English has a separate word for a Saint, someone with God in heaven. All other languages, as far as I know, call such a person, Holy; Holy Peter, Holy Paul and Holy Martha. We only use Holy with Holy Mary or Holy Moses. For us holiness, sainthood, may be as simple for us as being aware or knowing of God's

immanent presence. God is as part of my life as God is of yours. God is as part of the lives of our worst enemies and those we can't stand. Holiness with God is only a thought or memory away.

In approaching today's gospel, Jesus, in journeying to Jerusalem fulfills Zechariah's promise. Because of him the pagans will convert and begin to build the Kingdom of God. Jesus was to suffer and die in Jerusalem. Zechariah's message presaged Jesus mission. The evangelist Luke used Jesus' journey to Jerusalem as the sign of his mission's fulfillment. God's plan and Jesus mission were relentless. God desires the salvation of all God's children; the entire and only human race. The universality of Zechariah's vision culminated in Jesus' death and resurrection. The coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost established the mission of the Church to spread the gospel to all people and strive to the Kingdom of God.

Context is also important to today's gospel. Why, in a land where hospitality to strangers was and is the norm, are the Samaritans so rude and inhospitable? Jesus showed that he was Jewish in his journey, or pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Both these groups were related ethnically and religiously. Historically Israel, under kings Saul, David and Solomon, was one, united kingdom. Saul's family came from the northern part. David's came from Bethlehem in the south. After Solomon died, his son, Rehoboam, became the king.

He mismanaged the kingdom and the north split from the south establishing the divided kingdoms of Israel, in the north, and Judah, in the south. Samaria became Israel's capitol. There was no religious center. People worshipped God in the traditional places, mountaintops and shrines. These places had been locations of worship since the Hebrew people settled in the Promised Land. Because, under David, his armies defeated and captured Salem, the city of the Jebusites, Jerusalem became the capitol of his kingdom. David was, like Moses, anointed priest, prophet and King, he was a political, social and religious leader. Jerusalem became a religious hub and place of worship.

Solomon built the first temple which stood as a sign that God remained with and among God's people. After the kingdom divided, the people of Israel did not see Jerusalem of significant political importance. Instead of traveling there to worship, they continued to gather and worship in their traditional places. Between their time and the time of Jesus, both Israel and Judah were conquered by foreign powers and their people largely carried off to the north into Diaspora. We don't know exactly when a remnant of the north, Israel, returned to Palestine. We do know that in about 538 BCE, a remnant of Judah from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin returned. The rift between northerners and southerners was complete.

They were, for the 80 years of Diaspora, more ethnically diverse having intermarried with their pagan neighbors. Both peoples saw themselves and only themselves as God's Chosen people to the exclusion of anyone else. Having said this, Jesus declared his identity by his desire to worship in the Temple of Jerusalem. The division between Jews and Samaritans was much stronger than what divided other religious groups, Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes. Their divisions were merely theological. They were all Jewish. What divided north and south was in the blood. It still is. Samaritans and Jews may get along better today, but still they live apart.

The critical part of Jesus' and his disciple's experience is not their rejection nor the actions or lack of actions of the Samaritans. It is the reaction of James and John and Jesus' response to them. They seek divine intervention, namely hellfire and brimstone, a nuclear response to wipe them all out in an ultimate act of ethnic cleansing. Jesus rebuked his lads instead and moved on. Jesus had perspective from his mission; to die for all, including the Samaritans. Some of

them would become some of the earliest of Jesus' faithful. Remember the story of the Samaritan woman at the well.

Today's readings speak of diversity and acceptance and love of those whom we perceive to be different than we are. We are, of course, all human beings created in love by God in God's image and likeness. We all have the same redeemer, the son of God and Messiah, Jesus. We are all one as brothers and sisters in him.

May we always know God's blessing among us.

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