

Readings for Thursday the 22nd Week of the Year

FIRST READING: 1 Corinthians 3:18-23

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

Brothers and sisters: Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you considers himself wise in this age, let him become a fool, so as to become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God, for it is written: *God catches the wise in their own ruses*, and again: *The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain*. So let no one boast about human beings, for everything belongs to you, Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or the present or the future: all belong to you, and you to Christ, and Christ to God. The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 24:1bc-2, 3-4ab, 5-6

To the Lord belongs the earth and all that fills it.

The LORD's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it. For he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

To the Lord belongs the earth and all that fills it.

Who can ascend the mountain of the LORD? or who may stand in his holy place? He whose hands are sinless, whose heart is clean, who desires not what is vain.

To the Lord belongs the earth and all that fills it.

He shall receive a blessing from the LORD, a reward from God his savior. Such is the race that seeks for him, that seeks the face of the God of Jacob.

To the Lord belongs the earth and all that fills it.

Gospel: Luke 5:1-11

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." Simon said in reply, "Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets." When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that the boats were in danger of sinking. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for Thursday the 22nd Week of the Year

I have honored my followers in the same way that you honored me, in order that they may be one with each other, just as we are one. John 17:22 (CEV Bible)

This quote is the prayer of Jesus for those who believe; the members of Christ's Church. There is a passage from the Acts of the Apostles that said the Church was of one mind and heart. I always ask, when I read this passage, "For how long, fifteen minutes?" The state of the Church has rarely been what Jesus wanted and intended. The Church has always experienced division. There is a two volume set called, "A History of Christianity." It was written by Kenneth Latourette who was an historian of Japan, China and Christianity. Each volume runs about 800 pages. It sounds daunting, but I could not put the book down. Volume I covers the first fifteen hundred years of Church history. Volume II is the next five hundred years. Latourette died in 1968. He was an ordained Baptist minister as well as an author-historian. The set is still available on Amazon. It is not cheap.

The division of the Church is a scandal. In the early days, the days of Paul, doctrine and dogma were still being worked out. There were no written texts of the gospel, yet. The Epistles to the Corinthians were still just letters. The distances between communities were great. As preachers, they were on their own. Their personalities, like the famous evangelists and preachers today, could dominate their message. Here we have three contemporary evangelists mentioned; Paul, Apollos and Cephas. We know who Paul is. Cephas is Simon Peter. Peter is a nick-name. Petros is the ancient Greek word for rock. Cephas is the Aramaic word for rock. Peter's nick-name is the equivalent of the English word Rocky. Apollos is mentioned in Paul's letters and in the Acts of the Apostles. About him, we know very little. We have none of his letters. These three were, at times rivals and disagreed with one another from time to time. This particular passage shows how the Love of Christ could compel Christian unity. Paul was pretty level-headed here. His vision has often been quoted by those who seek unity, or at least dialogue, within the Christian Church of Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches. We are, before our titles, the Church of Jesus. We all belong to Christ before we belong to our various churches. Our divisions of politics, theology and institution are not what Jesus intended.

I always make a distinction between faith and religion. Faith is the gift from God. Religion is the construct of the faithful. Religion is the structure with which we experience and express our faith. Sometimes the structure can obscure the Faith of Christ. It is possible for people to maintain the structure without living their faith. Ritual, prayers, doctrine and dogma can be easier to hold dear than to reflect to others our love for God by loving ourselves and others. Saying a prayer is easier than forgiving an enemy or one who has hurt us.

Paul, through his vision expressed in today's readings, calls us to put our faith in Jesus first as we live, rather than our allegiance to our institutions. More roads lead to Christ than just mine or yours. Faith is a gift from God that God gives in God's own time. Each of us lives our faith as Christ's witness. The bond between us is not what we do for what we do may drive us apart. The bond between us is Jesus' loving presence.

Throughout the entire bible, God tells God's people, "Be not afraid." Just after the person receives this message, they go and do something difficult, painful or potentially deadly or something disastrous befalls them. I always ponder, like Mary in Luke, what these words mean.

Moses heard those words from the burning bush. He led God's people through the wilderness to the Promised Land, never getting there himself. Mary found herself pregnant and un-married thus risking being stoned to death as a result for the sin of adultery. Here the twelve embark on a journey that will inevitably lead most of them to martyrdom. When Luke tells us that they left everything, they left their families without support. We know, since scripture mentions Peter's mother-in-law, there was a Mrs. Peter and that James and John left their father, old Zebedee, in the boat. We don't know the families the others left behind and alone.

Has God told us, "Be not afraid?" We face a global, potentially fatal pandemic. Our social distancing can leave some of us isolated. People get gunned down in our streets. One is shot seven times in the back in front of his children. A teenage boy carrying an illegal automatic weapon shot and killed two people. What is the meaning of God's message in the face of this? I am afraid. I have no quick and easy answer. Perhaps there is none.

Here's the point at which I have to step back, take some time and reflect. Faith does not promise control over what happens in life. Faith is where we can encounter God amid chaos, pain and helplessness. The man shot in the back, the boy who killed two people, me sitting alone and typing this reflection and you who have taken the time to read it are, all of us God's beloved children. We all, like Paul said, belong to Christ and Christ to God. Life may not make sense. Injustice and sinners abound. God is just; that is, merciful and forgives sinners. I am the first. Each of us needs the mercy and forgiveness of God. Even though I can be impatient and judgmental, because God is love, eternally and unconditionally, I can be not afraid. God promised to save us all, in God's own time not mine.

May God help you to do what we all need to keep others and ourselves safe and healthy.

James D. Beath
September 3, 2020

At 7:30 this evening I will reach, by God's grace, my 67th year. That day was a Thursday too and for my mother, labor day.