

## Reflection for the 10<sup>th</sup> Thursday of the Year

FIRST READING: 2 Corinthians 1:18-22

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

Brothers and sisters: As God is faithful, our word to you is not “yes” and “no.” For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was proclaimed to you by us, Silvanus and Timothy and me, was not “yes” and “no,” but “yes” has been in him. For however many are the promises of God, their Yes is in him; therefore, the Amen from us also goes through him to God for glory. But the one who gives us security with you in Christ and who anointed us is God; he has also put his seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 119:129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 135

***Lord, let your face shine on me.***

Wonderful are your decrees; therefore I observe them.

***Lord, let your face shine on me.***

The revelation of your words sheds light, gives understanding to the simple.

***Lord, let your face shine on me.***

I gasp with open mouth in my yearning for your commands.

***Lord, let your face shine on me.***

Turn to me in pity as you turn to those who love your name.

***Lord, let your face shine on me.***

Steady my footsteps according to your promise, and let no iniquity rule over me.

***Lord, let your face shine on me.***

Let your countenance shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes.

***Lord, let your face shine on me.***

Gospel: Matthew 5:13-16

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

Jesus said to his disciples: “You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

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Sometimes, I will admit, when I read Paul's letters, they seem fuzzy. Paul's words and what he means don't seem to be clear. Today's terms that caught my attention were veiled and unveiled. Hearts don't wear veils. Did Paul write so his thoughts might be veiled? What was the purpose of Paul's writing letters in the first place? Wasn't it to proclaim the Gospel and draw the readers of his epistles into a more intimate relationship with God and the growing Church? Weren't his words to be a guide to the Kingdom of God? Thank God I have a variety of biblical commentaries to help cut through dense and obscure rhetoric.

It's easy to forget that Paul was a good and practicing Jew. There are elements of Judaism and its Traditions that his words reflect. Moses, the liberator of ancient Israel, held the threefold nature of God's Anointed One, the Messiah. He was priest, prophet and king, the precursor of Jesus, who, as Messiah, was also God's son and equally God. He met God face to face in the burning bush and on Mount Sinai. When he returned to the Israelite camp, he wore a veil to hide the glory of God. Moses face reflected God's glory and the people feared to look directly at Moses and see God's glory. They were afraid that the direct vision of God could kill them. The sanctuary, the holy of holies, in the temple of Jerusalem had a curtain or a veil that shut it off from the rest of the room. The congregation was not permitted entrance to the sanctuary or to see it. It was only for the priests to enter and witness.

For Paul, holiness, the presence of God, is for all to see, know and experience. This was part of what Jesus had won by his death on the cross. The incarnation, God becoming a human being, gave accessibility to God's presence to all who would seek it. Where do we encounter God's presence? For us it is simple; when two or three gather in Jesus' name, in the breaking of bread, whenever we pray or turn to God. Sometimes God turns to us. Don't we all, at odd times in our day, find ourselves thinking of God? Sometimes when we pray, don't we get lost in the prayer and find ourselves thinking of what God wants us to think? Those moments aren't distractions they are some of the most profound moments of blessing any of us can know. We, as God's beloved children can know God directly in moments of such clarity.

When we hear the gospel, its miracles, stories and events as having happened long ago and to other people, they can be veiled or obscured to us. We need to hear our lives and experiences reflected in them. We need to experience God's presence not long ago and far away but now. The gospel's message and promises are not just for the life after we die but now when we need them to live this life. Paul knew this and so can you and I.

Life in Paul's day, like ours, had its pain, difficulties and pratfalls. It was as easy for people of the first century who read the news to be as discouraged as we are. Hope does not come from our sorrows, troubles or sin. Hope comes as a gift from God; along with faith and love. God is love and God is infinite, eternal, faithful and unconditional. God shares these gifts as a result of God's limitless compassion and mercy. In God we find forgiveness of our failures, weakness and sin. In God we find the holiness of God's presence. In God we find salvation, eternal life and the Kingdom. We can find hope, through the Spirit, in our troubles and pain.

I am not a fan of the translations the bishops have promulgated of the liturgy, sacraments and scriptures. They seem to be written in a language that only God can speak and understand. They are for me a veil that can obscure prayer. Prayers are not our gifts to God, despite the fact that we pray them. They are in fact God's gifts to us. God wishes us to enter more deeply into a relationship with him and one another. God's intimacy is the gift of prayer. One of the things I

really find difficult is when the translation of scripture uses an un-translated, Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic word instead of what it means in English.

Today's word is "raqa." What in God's name does that word mean? I want to avoid Gehenna, which we translate as hell! Gehenna was Jerusalem's local garbage dump where the populace burnt their trash. Raqa means worthless or having no possibility of value. Why the bishops didn't want us to know that is beyond me. It is as if they have placed a veil over the word. I will admit that its use gives me an opportunity to show off my scholarship, which makes this moment an exposé of my hubris and ego. This is my veil. Before I went on my rant, I had another thought. Since "raqa" is unintelligible without a commentary, it is also like the way we write obscenity. Think of all the things we cannot and should not call people. We can be very good with our use of obscenity.

Part of human nature leads us all to recognize the limits, behavioral issues and sins of others. Whenever the scriptures speak of sinners and how they need to repent, don't we naturally, like a reflex, think of all those who need to hear that message? If you are at all like me, I must ask an important question. For whom were the scriptures written? It was written for the people who read it! We are the only ones who can then heed the message and repent. Those who never read it can witness how the Good News has transformed us. The Good News is that God's love saves, forgives and transforms those who know it. We, in turn, live what God has given us.

It is up to us to reconcile ourselves with those we have harmed or hurt. It's also about forgiving those who have hurt or harmed us. This passage about offering gifts is the way Jesus envisioned the process of reconciliation. Sometimes people will insist of celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation before receiving communion because of sin. In Jesus' mind that practice missed the point of his teaching. Jesus wants brothers and sisters gathered in unity around the altar. There we remember the gift of salvation that God has offered us through Jesus.

We experience unity with Jesus through our unity with each other. It is the personal responsibility of each of us there to seek reconciliation with one another. Some of Jesus' language may seem ominous and threatening the fires of hell. They are really a challenge to repent and live anew. That we will do only if we seek and accept God's grace to do so. Remember the words we pray in the Our Father, "Forgive us as we forgive others" (a paraphrase). Reread the closing parable of today's gospel. Jesus assumed that the offending party is the reader. He used the second person pronoun instead of the third. He's speaking directly to you and me.

Paul said that through Jesus an intimate and personal relationship with God is possible. Jesus has won this for us by his cross. When we join together, we become closer to God. Because of God's love, found in Jesus, we have hope in the midst of chaos. Jesus told us that in him it is possible to seek forgiveness of one another to receive the forgiveness of God. Jesus wanted each of us to know that every human being is valuable, a beloved child of God. We are the ones who hear the gospel and therefore have the responsibility to live it.

May the Lord bless and keep us on track to the Kingdom

James D. Beath  
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