

Readings for Thursday the 29th Week of the Year

FIRST READING: Ephesians 3:14-21

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

Brothers and sisters: I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 33:1-2, 4-5, 11-12, 18-19

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

Exult, you just, in the LORD; praise from the upright is fitting. Give thanks to the LORD on the harp; with the ten-stringed lyre chant his praises.

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

For upright is the word of the LORD, and all his works are trustworthy. He loves justice and right; of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

But the plan of the LORD stands forever; the design of his heart, through all generations. Blessed the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he has chosen for his own inheritance.

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

But see, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him, upon those who hope for his kindness, To deliver them from death and preserve them in spite of famine.

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

Gospel: Luke 12:49-53

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus said to his disciples: "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for Thursday the 29th Week of the Year

Sometimes, in his letters, Paul said some curious things. In today's reading he told us that he knelt before the Father. Why would he have said this? Why is kneeling important? We kneel at mass considering it a form of reverence; why? One would kneel in the presence of a king or someone of power and importance. Was it out of reverence, obedience, respect or something else? The something else is caution. Powerful people want to protect their power and person. It takes more time for a kneeling person to rise, break into a run, draw a sword and attack. The extra movement of someone who kneels gives the bodyguards a split-second more time to defend their charge. These days as I continue to age, kneeling has become more painful. Does God seek prayer to be painful? God seeks us in prayer not our discomfort. I like to be comfortable in prayer as I am comfortable with God.

Having said that, by telling us of his kneeling, Paul has cued us in that he prayed on our behalf. He didn't say that he prayed, but he told us his prayer. May God grant us strength through the Holy Spirit. This prayer is very appropriate for us as we face rising rates of COVID 19 infections, hospitalizations and deaths. We have been besieged since late winter and all of us grow weary of the virus and message to wash our hands, keep social distance and wear a mask in public. We all need God's strength now to bolster our resolve and actions for the common good.

He prayed for Christ to remain within us so that through faith we may be grounded in Love. Again Paul's prayer hits home for this is the real reason we continue to do the three actions above. Our reason is our love of others which shows our love of self and love of God. We do the three things as witness to our faith. In those actions we will know the fullness of God, as Paul prayed. Paul has prayed for us collectively as human beings, us as the Church and us as individual brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

This is powerful stuff. Paul gave us an insight of his personal prayer life and personal connection to the people to whom he was sent and those he served as apostle, teacher and preacher. Through these words we glimpse his vision and experience of God. Through these things we can focus on our lives as followers of Jesus and our mission to live the gospel of Jesus. For we, too like Paul, have been baptized into Jesus, the Church and the Holy Spirit thereby inheriting Christ's own mission and the promise of the Kingdom of God. God's grace surges through us.

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. How do we know this? The powerful transformation of summer to autumn happens now. We witness it, the colors, the chill and the earlier night. God's creation responds to change as do we. How can we not know that the Lord is all around and within us? Horrible as COVID 19 is in its grip, I find wonder in the awesome way it works. It survives and grows, at first, without people knowing they have it and shed it thereby spreading it. For a virus that is not really alive unless it infects living tissue, it can, without a brain and conscious thought, exploit stubborn and thoughtless people to survive. Even in its terrible spread we can know, if not creation's goodness, the wonder at the way creation works.

Context in the scriptures is always relevant for us to discern the Word's meaning. Jesus, the Word, spoke these words. They sound as if Jesus got out of the wrong side of the bed. His words today are scary and harsh. There is no gentleness in them and are seemingly without hope. What gives? This passage is from chapter twelve in Luke. Back in the middle of chapter

nine, Jesus began what Lucan scholars call, "Jesus' Journey to Jerusalem." I like alliteration; it has such a sweet sound, almost poetic. However Jesus journey is to betrayal, suffering and to be hung on a tree to die. We think that as the third person of the Trinity, as the Son of the Father being truly God, his life would be different from ours. It was and it wasn't. Jesus was like us in everything but sin. Jesus faced all the pratfalls we face. He had all the temptations we do. He experienced all the emotions we do, not just the pleasant ones either. Jesus wept, doubted, feared and felt anxiety. This passage shows his pain as he began to appropriate the ramifications of doing the Father's will; he would suffer and die the death of a criminal.

He revealed the cost of doing God's will as it affected himself and how it could affect his followers. We are Jesus' followers; we don't face an easy way either. Jesus showed that as he followed the Father's way, he is with us as we travel in our way through Life to the father. Jesus knows our struggles and fears since he went through what we experience. How often do our lives feel like they will fall apart? Just in the political, social and infectious problems we face now. Jesus, like a good neighbor, is there, unlike auto insurance companies. In our personal messes that only each one of us carries alone, Jesus is there. I remember the prayer-poem Footsteps. When we see one set of tracks following our personal trail of tears, we forget that they are Jesus tracks as he carries us.

We will all and always face interpersonal and family problems; so did Jesus. All four gospels tell of Jesus' meddling and uncomprehending kinfolk. Jesus' mother nagged him to change water into wine. Mary carried in her heart all the trouble and pain Jesus caused her. His mother and kinfolk called him crazy when he kept preaching and teaching instead of going home for dinner. Jesus sounds more and more like us. That's the point; he is in all but sin. He couldn't be our savior otherwise. God became a human being to suffer and die in our place for the price of our sins. Jesus won us the Glory of God through the gory, bloody cross and grave. Jesus rising gives us God's gift of new and eternal life. Resurrection can only happen through death.

In fact I also believe that Jesus was having a bad day. Just like all of us have had them, in the last few months, Jesus stands in solidarity and fellowship with us, not just in the life to come, in the Kingdom of God, but now as we live; now that we need it. He could not be our model and goal otherwise.

The admonition still remains. We keep ourselves and others safe as we work together and do what's right. Jesus stands with us as we do.

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