

Readings for the 22nd Thursday of the Year

FIRST READING: Colossians 1:9-14

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

Brothers and sisters: From the day we heard about you, we do not cease praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, so as to be fully pleasing, in every good work bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with every power, in accord with his glorious might, for all endurance and patience, with joy giving thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light. He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 98:2-3ab, 3cd-4, 5-6

The Lord has made known his salvation.

The LORD has made his salvation known: in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice. He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness toward the house of Israel.

The Lord has made known his salvation.

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation by our God. Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands; break into song; sing praise.

The Lord has made known his salvation.

Sing praise to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and melodious song. With trumpets and the sound of the horn sing joyfully before the King, the LORD.

The Lord has made known his salvation.

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 the 22nd Thursday of the Year

Today we begin to read a new Pauline letter; to the community of Christ in Colossus. This Church was already established and thriving. Paul has prayed for this Church. Mostly he reflects on what God has done and what Jesus does for them. Since this is the same thing that Paul did as he began his letter to the Thessalonians, is this merely a pro-forma greeting? I remember when in grammar school, we learned the formulae of letter writing. There were personal, business and formal letters. Each one had a particular set of grammatical rules. Did letter writing in Paul's day have similar forms? Most likely they did. I believe that Paul wrote from his heart. His prayer was sincere. His words were filled with faith, hope and love. He had no idea, when he wrote his letters that we, two millennia later, would still be reading them, let alone treating them as God's Word. After all, as Paul often proclaimed, he was a sinner.

Paul's purpose for this prayer was to ground the readers in God's grace. In God's grace God's people live, act and love. The basis of Christian witness comes from their gift of faith and God's bounty, not from them selves. Salvation is by Jesus' dying on the cross and not any action, movement or work any one can make. We give witness to God's gifts by what we say and do. We reveal God's presence to others only through God's grace. Our desire to do so is also God's gift. This notion is at the heart of Christian faith and the life of Christ's Church.

The response today is, "The Lord makes known his salvation." How? We can read about it in scripture, as we do today. We can celebrate or remember it as we do at mass. This is all fine and good, but without living what God has won and done for us, how can anyone who doesn't read God's word or celebrate mass come to know. We are God's instruments of witness. We show Christ as we act and interact with others. This was the case in the days of Paul and now when we leave church into our community.

Today's gospel gives us an insight into Jesus' practical knowledge and instinct. It wasn't just the press of the crowd that motivated Jesus to step into a fishing boat. With such a large crowd, acoustics could be an issue. In Monty Python's "Life of Brian," Jesus preached to a huge crowd. There were those on the farthest edges who couldn't hear his words. They heard, "Blessed are the cheese makers." There was no electronic amplification in First Century Palestine. The water surface of the lake acted as a natural megaphone. Water is flat and anyone who has done a belly flop upon diving into water knows that its surface doesn't compress. It responds like a solid sound reflector.

Jesus did not get a freebee either. For the service the fishermen, who undoubtedly listened to Jesus as he preached, provided them with a substantial catch. We think of the fishermen who became Jesus' apostles to be poor. Everyone ate fish that lived around the Lake of Galilee. They made a very good living. This is why they could afford to travel with Jesus. They did so in the off season when they couldn't fish. Fishermen of the lake still make a good living. People still eat fish.

Peter was humbled by the size of his catch and linked Jesus' advice for divine intervention. He was also inspired by what he heard Jesus say as well. He did become a "fisher of men." He left and followed Jesus as did his brother Andrew and buddies the Zebedee brothers James and John. These would become Jesus' first disciples and then his apostles or missionaries. We read these things in scripture. Do we witness Jesus' working through events and people we experience during our days? We do for this is why we go to mass and why you're reading this reflection. Jesus has the same effect on us as he did on the lives of the apostles. We experience and show the continuity of God's presence and action in life today. It's the same message and the same wonder as it was in Jesus' day.

Paul prayed, Jesus preached and invited. These events took place many centuries ago. Paul prayed for us too. We hear Jesus' words and witness his actions as we read the gospel. Both have done this for our benefit. Jesus invites us to follow him. This we do through prayer and God's Word.

May our actions reflect all we believe through God's love.

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