

Readings for Thursday the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

FIRST READING: Ephesians 1:1-10

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

Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the holy ones who are in Ephesus and faithful in Christ Jesus: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will, for the praise of the glory of his grace that he granted us in the beloved. In Christ we have redemption by his Blood, the forgiveness of transgressions, in accord with the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will in accord with his favor that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 98:1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4, 5-6

The Lord has made known his salvation.

Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done wondrous deeds; His right hand has won victory for him, his holy arm.

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 11:47-54

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

The Lord said: "Woe to you who build the memorials of the prophets whom your fathers killed. Consequently, you bear witness and give consent to the deeds of your ancestors, for they killed them and you do the building. Therefore, the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and Apostles; some of them they will kill and persecute' in order that this generation might be charged with the blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who died between the altar and the temple

building. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be charged with their blood! Woe to you, scholars of the law! You have taken away the key of knowledge. You yourselves did not enter and you stopped those trying to enter.” When Jesus left, the scribes and Pharisees began to act with hostility toward him and to interrogate him about many things, for they were plotting to catch him at something he might say.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for Thursday the 28th Week of Ordinary Time

Paul’s letters all seem to begin in the same way. They can sound rambling, with no vowels in sentences that run on and on. Sometimes his letters begin with poetic passages that are very familiar. I like to do something contemporary. The ancients had a different use for the first person pronoun. Often they didn’t use it. Augustine, who wrote an autobiography and not a memoir, was the first person of the ancient world who used the words I, me and mine as we do. Paul began this letter to the Ephesians by establishing his identity and mission. This he did without using the word “I.” To have done so would have been like how we can use the word “you” when we are really speaking of our selves. I add two words to Paul’s opening sentence, “I am.” Incidentally, that’s also how God and Jesus referred to themselves in scripture, “I am.” Paul, perhaps, did not add those words because he was Paul and not God.

Not only did Paul proclaim his identity and ministry, he named us as well, the holy and faithful ones in Christ. Granted, he wrote to the Church in Ephesus nearly two millennia ago, but here we are reading these words as did the original recipients. Paul, thereby, establishes our identity and mission as well. The following words, in this letter, are a canticle, or hymn which we use today in the same way. The psalms are also canticles. They are sung as prayers as St. Augustine wrote, “The one who sings, prays twice.” They also contain a catechetical message. In it Paul laid out the basic message and teaching, we call Kerygma, of the Christian faith. God’s blessing came to us through Jesus, specifically through Jesus death and resurrection which won for us redemption and the promise of eternal life and the kingdom of God.

I always have to read the canticle with care. It is often part of the Liturgy of the Hours, which I have prayed since college. I know it more or less by heart and have a tendency to rattle it off because I know it so well. It’s like having to pause and say I love you to those we’ve known for many years. Appreciating the depth and beauty of a long prayed prayer is just like telling those we love of their depth and beauty to us. Only God is holy. He makes us holy through the blessing of Jesus. We believe in Jesus. Thus we become God’s beloved sons and daughters who become heirs to God’s kingdom. All of this was part of God’s plan, devised before all creation. God’s love for us is as eternal and unconditional as God is.

The canticle establishes God’s eternal and unconditional promise to us. God loves each of us as a beloved child. God has, through the cross of Jesus, forgiven our sins. God has promised us eternal life through Jesus rising from the dead. Through Jesus promise to come again, God has promised the coming of the Kingdom. In calling us God’s beloved, Paul established our bond as God’s Church, love. Love is God. God binds us as the Church with eternal and unconditional love. We are all made one in Christ as the Trinity is one.

There are a lot of things we know by heart and can thereby forget. How do we end our prayers? We ask this through Christ our Lord. We make a powerful statement of faith each time we utter

or read those words. Salvation comes through Jesus. This prayer ends with one word, used as a response, "Amen." Amen means, literally, so be it or thus it is. It is an acknowledgement of our faith in the previous prayer. When we say amen, we actually mean I believe. When we take time to remember the words and their meaning, we can glimpse the mystery of God and can know our holiness with God's presence.

Paul proclaimed his identity and mission. In doing so Paul reveals God's identity and God's plan for us. Each of us becomes holy and receives salvation through Jesus. In Christ, as the Church, we join all those who went before us and all those who come after us to God's kingdom when Jesus returns.

What do we hear Jesus saying in today's gospel? Who was Jesus audience? Was it just the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and authorities? To whom is Jesus speaking today as we read it? One can assume he spoke and is speaking to some one else. I have this tendency as I read. There is an important linguistic clue. Jesus spoke as the first person to the second person. He said you not they or those. As we read this, Jesus speaks to us. Knowing that, do Jesus words fall on deaf ears? Am I guilty of the lie behind the memorials? Is there hypocrisy in my words? Can my actions be malicious? Are you talking to me, Jesus? Whereas I believe, I am also a sinner who relies on God's eternal and unconditional love for my salvation. The greatest stumbling block to salvation is not weakness or a lack of faith. If I remember all those to whom Jesus spoke and now speaks and do not include myself in the ranks of sinners, I fall into a two-fold trap. I judge others. In doing so, I am guilty of the sin of idolatry for I have taken on myself the role and place of God. I do so because of the true great human stumbling block to accepting God's salvation; self-righteousness. This too is the sin of idolatry. Only God is righteous. God's justice is always mercy and compassion for the sinner, of whom I am foremost. God's mercy leads to forgiveness. Mine would lead those I judge to punishment and me farther from God's mercy. Thank God that God is the one who judges sinners.

To hear Jesus speak these powerful words personally can lead us to memorialize not our failures, guilt and shame but to remember the salvation Jesus has won for us by his cross and resurrection. The authorities, after this and similar encounters with Jesus, started their plot against him. God became human through Jesus for this purpose. Jesus mission was to die on the cross to save the human race from sin and death. The authorities carried out God's plan. Jesus died for them as well as you and me too. Our mercy is limited. Our justice is punitive. God's mercy and justice have an infinite reserve of eternal and unconditional love. This is why we call the gospel good news. We do not concern ourselves with the sins of others and God's response to them. We are responsible to God for the lives we live.

Paul's message included all of us in God's eternal plan for salvation leading to the kingdom of God. Jesus reminds us, today sharply, of our responsibility to hear his words, take them to heart and live anew. Jesus fulfilled his mission on the cross. We believe and so can live anew to give witness now and in God's kingdom.

To wear a mask in public, wash our hands and to keep physical distance from others is one way to give that witness. God works through our actions.

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