

Readings for Thursday after Ash Wednesday

FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

A reading from the Book of Deuteronomy:

Moses said to the people: "Today I have set before you life and prosperity, death and doom. If you obey the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I enjoin on you today, loving him, and walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments, statutes and decrees, you will live and grow numerous, and the LORD, your God, will bless you in the land you are entering to occupy. If, however, you turn away your hearts and will not listen, but are led astray and adore and serve other gods, I tell you now that you will certainly perish; you will not have a long life on the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and occupy. I call heaven and earth today to witness against you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the LORD, your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him. For that will mean life for you, a long life for you to live on the land that the LORD swore he would give to your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 1:1-2, 3, 4 and 6

Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

Blessed the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked Nor walks in the way of sinners, nor sits in the company of the insolent, But delights in the law of the LORD and meditates on his law day and night.

Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

He is like a tree planted near running water, That yields its fruit in due season, and whose leaves never fade. Whatever he does, prospers.

Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

Not so the wicked, not so; they are like chaff which the wind drives away. For the LORD watches over the way of the just, but the way of the wicked vanishes.

Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

GOSPEL: Luke 9:22-25

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus said to his disciples: "The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised." Then he said to all, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?"

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for Thursday after Ash Wednesday

What is the choice that Moses set before God's people? Some may think that the choice is to keep the commandments. There are actually six hundred and thirteen commandments contained in Mosaic Law, not just ten. For anyone to remain always and completely faithful to them is impossible. As Christians, we find it impossible to keep the Ten all the time. Why? We are all human and therefore all have the propensity to sin. God does not want us to sin. Neither does God desire a sinner's death.

So, what does God want? God has first, and most obviously, given us life; we live. God sent Jesus to save us. These are acts of love that God has first given; the basis for our choice. The choice each person makes is to love God, self and neighbor. We can do this only because God has first loved us. Moses asked the people to love and choose God for God had first chosen them. The choice they made was not once and for all. They made the choice each time they encountered another person. Would they respect them, love them, treat them well or hurt them? God knew that people could not choose to do what's right, just and loving all the time. God created humanity; God knows the human soul more intimately, honestly and lovingly than any of us can. This choice is to seek God, know God's presence and seek God's forgiveness in sin.

One of the first times I ever encountered a "born again Christian," the person asked me if I knew Jesus as my personal savior and had chosen him. I responded from my heart, each day! However, Jesus chose me. I pointed to my baptism, first communion and confirmation as the source of this process. I was in college at the time and a seminarian preparing for priesthood. The person pointed to the day, hour and location of the blessed moment he was saved. I said that my growing faith in God and in Jesus will continue until I die. Discerning the Holy Spirit is the task of a life time not a one-time event. I don't know if that person ever understood what I had just said as he walked away. I had professed my personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Each day, as we choose to get out of bed, we choose to face our lives as they unfold. As I age, the act becomes more difficult with stiffness and pain, but I embrace it as the gift that it is; by God's love. It is an act of faith. I may not always like the way my day unfolds. I can accept it because it is still God's gift to me. God's gifts are not always pleasant and not always easy. It is the challenge of the Cross of Jesus that supports me. God gave Jesus what he needed to face and embrace his cross. Each day, Jesus helps me to face mine; one step at a time and in his way; not mine. To pray, "Thy will be done!" is only through the grace of God.

Has the way of the wicked ever vanished? I still follow the news, the world is always a deadly place; no one gets out alive as people. I seriously doubt that the eternal life of God's promise is a continuation or perpetuation of this life. It may be for St. Anthony. That poor guy works harder in eternity finding people's keys and glasses than any of us can. I prefer to pray as Jesus taught us; to the Father through him. "We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord," this makes our prayers a profession of faith. The way of the wicked is not just another's way. I am a sinner and do what is wicked when I sin.

God seeks my salvation as a sinner, not my death. Jesus has transformed the way of sinners by the Way of the Cross. Once and for all, Jesus offered his life as a sacrifice to God to redeem us all from sin to live a new life that will come to full reality in the kingdom of God. The Kingdom is

here; but not yet and in a state of quantum flux until Jesus returns at the end of this age. Jesus returned to the Father, remains among and within us and will return again. God knows not time as we do. We strive in faith to do our best and will always fail. When our choices and actions are not good enough, Jesus is there to forgive; transforming us as God's beloved children and as Jesus' beloved siblings. We are all brothers and sisters in him as we strive for the Kingdom of God in a lifetime's journey of conversion.

In Jesus, we have a choice. In our choice we gain the promise of eternal life in God's Kingdom. We can gain glimpses of it now as Jesus gains us in through his cross and we have gained him in faith. With an offer like this, what else would we choose? Choose life and God; live life with each other. All this we gain through God's amazing grace and God's infinite, eternal and unconditional love. The fidelity of the Children of Israel still thrives. From their fidelity was born Jesus and through him we have faith; we thrive in our fidelity. I choose Jesus each day. Each day he chooses me.

May our choice remain clear in Christ.

James D. Beath

March 3, 2022