

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 31:31-34

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah:

The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers: the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt; for they broke my covenant, and I had to show myself their master, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer will they have need to teach their friends and relatives how to know the LORD. All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the LORD, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 51:12-13, 14-15, 18-19

Create a clean heart in me, O God.

A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. Cast me not out from your presence, and your Holy Spirit take not from me.

Create a clean heart in me, O God.

Give me back the joy of your salvation, and a willing spirit sustain in me. I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners shall return to you.

Create a clean heart in me, O God.

For you are not pleased with sacrifices; should I offer a burnt offering, you would not accept it. My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn.

Create a clean heart in me, O God.

Gospel: Matthew 16:13-23

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, "God forbid,

Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you.” He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 18th Thursday of the Year II

What’s a covenant? It is a relationship between people that is deeply personal. It is much more than an agreement or contract. It is a binding between the involved parties with oaths or vows, rituals, prayers and commitments with obligations. When we, as Christians, hear the words New Covenant, we think of Jesus who had two complete natures; human and divine. Such is our intimacy with God today. We are bound to God through Jesus. Our faith in God is God’s gift given in the Holy Spirit and God’s sign of our salvation and promise of eternal life.

God gave us Jesus. God gave us faith. God offered us salvation through our faith in God and in Jesus. Nothing we make, offer or do can save us. It is God who saves. As a sign of our salvation, we give witness to our faith in all we think, say and do. Jeremiah has spoken of the grace of God to save God’s people and change their hearts to love God and each other. God will forgive us and no longer remember our sins. Only God can forgive and forget. That’s because that God is the eternal now; God’s name in Hebrew means I AM. God does not remember what we have done nor anticipate what we will do. God forgives us now when we need forgiveness.

Jesus asked, “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered in faith, “You are the Messiah and the Son of God!” For this, Jesus blessed Peter for proclaiming the faith the Father revealed to him. The Church is not based on the rock of Peter but on the rock of Peter’s faith. Both Peter and his faith were still a bit shaky. For when Peter heard Jesus speak of his mission, Peter could not accept that anything bad and painful could happen to Jesus. Jesus spoke of his passion and death which shocked Peter to the core. He did not understand what he believed. This was the first Peter heard this and it was difficult for him. When Jesus called him Satan, Jesus did not curse him. The blessing remained. Jesus merely helped Peter to discern what his faith implied.

Jesus’ question was to all his disciples. This includes us now. Who do we say Jesus to be? We know the faith of the Church. Jesus is Messiah, Lord and Savior. But is this a mere repeating of Church doctrine for us. He has entered a New Covenant with each of us. How can our relationship with him reflect something deeply personal? Jesus, as one like us, is our brother and we share the same Father, God.

May we come to know Jesus as we gather together and share the Eucharist.

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