

FIRST READING: Kings 19:19-21

A reading from the first Book of Kings:

Elijah set out, and came upon Elisha, son of Shaphat, as he was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen; he was following the twelfth. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak over him. Elisha left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, "Please, let me kiss my father and mother goodbye, and I will follow you." Elijah answered, "Go back! Have I done anything to you?" Elisha left him and, taking the yoke of oxen, slaughtered them; he used the plowing equipment for fuel to boil their flesh, and gave it to his people to eat. Then he left and followed Elijah as his attendant.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 16:1b-2a and 5, 7-8, 9-10

You are my inheritance, O Lord.

Keep me, O God, for in you I take refuge; I say to the LORD, "My Lord are you." O LORD, my allotted portion and my cup, you it is who hold fast my lot.

You are my inheritance, O Lord.

I bless the LORD who counsels me; even in the night my heart exhorts me. I set the LORD ever before me; with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed.

You are my inheritance, O Lord.

Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices, my body, too, abides in confidence; Because you will not abandon my soul to the nether world, nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption.

You are my inheritance, O Lord.

Gospel: Matthew 5:33-37

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, *Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow.* But I say to you, do not swear at all; not by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything more is from the Evil One."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 10th Tuesday of the Year II

Today's Elijah story seems, on the surface, to be a charming story of trust and hope. It is not. Why was there a drought in the first place? In those days it wasn't as is now because of any global warming. The author of the situation was Elijah. He wielded the power of God to place the world in a three year drought to prove that God is the one, true God and all the rest are

mere idols created in the image of humans. This woman and her son lucked out. God chose them to survive starvation and thirst. They had to toil for this status too by housing and feeding Elijah, who was God's prophet. The neighboring families likely died.

When I tell it this way, there is no charm. What's at stake was this woman's, her son's and Elijah's very lives. Her choice held the balance. She trusted this Man of God. She wasn't even Jewish. That's the true power of this passage. This pagan woman trusted God and cared for God's prophet. This story always reminds me of an old Kingston Trio song, "You've Got to Prime the Pump." Old pumps had leather washers to create the pumping suction. These dry out and have to be wet or primed. To do that, one would leave a single sealed jar of water that had to be poured into the pump first. A thirsty traveler could be tempted to drink it instead. Priming the pump would give lots of water. Drinking the jar first would get no more water.

There's another aspect to this story. All people knew, according to 1 Kings, of the situation that caused the drought. Ahab, the king of Israel, allowed his wives to worship their own gods, small "g." His marriages may have been more for political gain and regional peace. They were daughters of neighboring kings and princes. His prime wife was the infamous Jezebel. The main idol god was Baal who was a fertility god. Elijah, during a three year drought was proving to everybody that there were no gods but God, YHWH. The story focused on proof of God and not on the havoc, destruction and death the situation brought about. It was Elijah who invoked the power of God as punishment. Today we can blame global warming for droughts; based upon human activity. In those days drought was an act of God.

This woman was pagan and she heeded the call of God and of God's prophet. This was also a lesson for the Jewish king Ahab. He heeded nothing from God or his prophet. He was a believer and supposedly ruling on the throne in God's name. With this Pagan widow's trust and faith, Elijah intended to shame the honor of Ahab. This story is an insult and a scandal to Ahab. From our modern, American viewpoint we don't see what the story implied to Ahab and the Jewish people. God saved a Pagan woman and her son and not God's people. Our lesson from this passage can be to be mindful of our behavior as we live in God's presence and turn to God if and when we sin. Through faith God has saved us and will forgive all our sins.

How many times have we heard the line of this gospel? "You are the salt of the earth!" What does that mean in our usage of it? You're just like me and I can rely on you. Some one like this is a great gift; faithful and dependable. It can also mean; I can take you for granted. What did Jesus actually mean? Did he mean it like we do? First salt is always salt. If salt stops being salty, it's no longer salt. Jesus has called his disciples, and us, faithful. Jesus has paid us all a powerful compliment. However, this story has a cultural context that we may not know.

A slab of salt is used in ovens that burn animal dung as fuel. It turns out that the dried manure will burn better and hotter when burned on a slab of salt. The salt acts as a catalyst for a fine, hot fire. But, after a time of use, the catalytic effect lessens and needs to be replaced. Salt was as precious as gold in many cultures. Part of a Roman legionnaire's salary was paid with salt. It is essential for life. Our blood has the same basic PH as the ocean. It can preserve food. So, when we call someone the "salt of the earth," we recognize the value of another precious person.

Since my living area gets lit at night by high-tech, low electrical use LED bulbs, I'm a world and millennia away from Jesus next compliment. I still have an old-style, but still reliable, kerosene lamp and a few candles when we loose electrical power. They can last for many hours giving light. I can read by kerosene light very well and have had to do it from time to time. Jesus referred to an open flame light; oil, bees' wax or animal fat would be the common fuel. Few people would think of putting a basket over an open flame. Because if someone ever did, their burning house would eventually give light to the entire neighborhood. We take electric lights for granted at night. To the ancients, one tended the fire that produced light for lamps and cooking fires. The process of lighting a fire was a labor without it. They had no matches, pocket BICs or wall switches.

Jesus was saying to his disciples and us that we are valuable to him and each other. More valuable than the salt we need to live. And once we have faith in God and in Jesus, we can never really loose it. It has transformed us into witnesses to Christ is all we think, say and do. With all we meet we will reflect our great value, for in us we reflect the gift of Jesus' new life and light.

May we know and reflect Jesus to all we meet.

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