

FIRST READING: Kings 17:7-16

A reading from the first Book of Kings:

The brook near where Elijah was hiding ran dry, because no rain had fallen in the land. So the LORD said to Elijah: "Move on to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have designated a widow there to provide for you." He left and went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the entrance of the city, a widow was gathering sticks there; he called out to her, "Please bring me a small cupful of water to drink." She left to get it, and he called out after her, "Please bring along a bit of bread." She answered, "As the LORD, your God, lives, I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar and a little oil in my jug. Just now I was collecting a couple of sticks, to go in and prepare something for myself and my son; when we have eaten it, we shall die." Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid. Go and do as you propose. But first make me a little cake and bring it to me. Then you can prepare something for yourself and your son. For the LORD, the God of Israel, says, 'The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the LORD sends rain upon the earth.'" She left and did as Elijah had said. She was able to eat for a year, and Elijah and her son as well; the jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, as the LORD had foretold through Elijah.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 4:2-3, 4-5, 7b-8

Lord, let your face shine on us.

When I call, answer me, O my just God, you who relieve me when I am in distress; Have pity on me, and hear my prayer! Men of rank, how long will you be dull of heart? Why do you love what is vain and seek after falsehood?

Lord, let your face shine on us.

Know that the LORD does wonders for his faithful one; the LORD will hear me when I call upon him. Tremble, and sin not; reflect, upon your beds, in silence.

Lord, let your face shine on us.

O LORD, let the light of your countenance shine upon us! You put gladness into my heart, more than when grain and wine abound.

Lord, let your face shine on us.

Gospel: Matthew 5:13-16

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

Jesus said to his disciples: "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 11th Tuesday of the Year

So, all Ahab had to do to escape a bloody fate was to turn to God and repent? This is a bit disturbing. The man got away with murder! Ahab killed Naboth because he wanted to expand his living space. This is certainly not what I would want to see happen. But, and this is important, I am not God. God is infinite, eternal and unconditional love. That's the difference.

There is no sin too big for God to forgive. God will never turn a contrite sinner away who seeks God's forgiveness. All of us need to hear this message. Scripture is the Good News.

Now wait, why will God afflict Ahab's son, who is innocent of any of his father's crimes, with a blood bath? That sounds a bit vindictive and very unfair! The lesson is in God forgiving Ahab. Turn to God in repentance and God will forgive. That's all Ahab's son needs to do; turn to God. Even in our lives, actions have consequences, as anyone who has gotten a speeding ticket knows. Even if God forgives us for breaking a traffic law, we must pay the fine or incur a greater sanction. No one can ever bring the murdered Naboth back to life. This ancient Middle Eastern curse is nasty, but God did not cast it. Elijah did. God led the king to seek forgiveness.

I will say, though, that I still find this passage disturbing. Since I am a Twenty First Century Urban American, I don't have the same sense of honor that the ancient Jewish, Palestinian people had. Ahab had done a despicable act of murder. He severely tarnished his families honor. In such situations, often the son would spent his life trying to undo what his old man had done to restore, in the eyes of neighbors, and in this case all of Israel, the family reputation and shining star. The curse we must understand within that strict honor code.

Perfection is only found in God. I have seen a number of Persian Rugs in my day. The Islamic rug makers always make them with a flaw in the elaborate design because only God can make one that's perfect. Given this, why has Jesus commanded us to be what we can never become, at least in this life, perfect? Listen to the context and content of Jesus' teaching. He's asking us to take one more step in loving. Include your enemies in your love list. Include them in your prayers. Respect them and treat them well.

I have visited the Civil War battle site of Antietam. As I toured the historic park, there were many monuments for the Union Armies' dead but none for the Confederate Armies' dead. I had a What-Would-Jesus-Do moment and offered a silent prayer for them. I do this on Memorial Day too, for all fallen soldiers of war, not just ours. Jesus asks us to be as best we can. All of us can stand to be a bit better in the ways we treat other people. Our enemies and those we can't stand are also God's beloved children as we are. We can still encounter God in them as they can with us. Jesus asks for what's possible from us; to act in his name. When we faith? God's love forgives sinners, of whom I am the first.

May God's grace help us to live the Golden Rule.

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PS: I had a classmate who was a Benedictine Monk for twenty five years. He had this prayer posted on his door frame for him to see and read each time he left his room.

The Difficult Prayer

God be as kind to me today as I am to my worst enemy.

Words to ponder; actions to take...