

Reflection for the 12th Thursday of the Year II

It's always amazing how fast time can fly. Within two days, in the book of second Kings we have jumped more than one hundred years into the future! Nebuchadnezzar, the king of ancient Babylon, now stands at Jerusalem's gates to demand the surrender of the eighteen year old king, Jehoiachin, who's no more than a teenager. With his surrender, all Jerusalem is now booty for the benefit of Babylon. The riches, the leadership, the craftsmen and artists, Nebuchadnezzar will take with him to home.

Sunday I brought my laundry to the basement door for our housekeeper. Fr. Blazek has been moving out, little by little for weeks to his new parish. Most of his heavy furniture is gone now. I was surprised to see that our kitchen and dining room furniture, all tables and chairs, china cabinet and credenza are all gone! We are about to close as a parish on June 30. Our end is near. On Tuesday, I entered the church vestibule for mass and was startled to see all our furniture of hospitality and comfort was gone too. It's so empty now. So, when I read this morning's readings, I couldn't help but make the connection.

Yet, the barbarians are not at our door. We do not face annihilation and Diaspora. We are merely in the process of closing our three parishes to form another. Our resources now are shared with the new parish we three form. Actually, as of today, I have no idea where this stuff all went. I'll find out by the time I write the reflection for Sunday. I assume that it's gone into dispersal to the new and as yet unnamed parish. But we all know what the word assume can call us. I'll still be living here for the next year until I reach seventy and retire. It was a shock.

Sometimes we can forget the goal of Jesus' promise of new life. It's not just for eternal life with God or some reward in a heavenly paradise; it's the Kingdom of God when Jesus returns in his glory as king. This world and heaven will be transformed. The dead will rise to life joined to the living. Heaven, the Earth, the Risen and the Living will all rule forever; One with Jesus, the Father and the Spirit. This is our true glory and goal; the fulfillment of Jesus' promise. Our closure and that of Our Lady Mother and St. Eugene is part of the process. Our formation as a new parish is our current goal and act of faith. We know when this will happen. Closing is our shared grief. Our new formation is our shared hope; something concrete and real that we experience on our true journey to Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

From other parishes where I have lived and worked, I've learned that sometimes up to a third of parishioners are so filled with grief, outrage and anger that their church has been closed that they never belong to the new one. It's only a parish and not the Church of Jesus that closes. The Church is always much more than buildings and property. We, as the Church, are the People of God, one with all who believe in God and in Jesus; all Christian People. Politics, culture and theology, all of human origin, have defined our ecclesial boundaries. The heart of Jesus encompasses all. It is my fervent prayer that Jesus' true heart will prevail to reunite us. The greatest miracle that God can carry out is to heal our troubled, and wounded human hearts. His final prayer to and for us was, "May they all be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." (*John 17:21, the Revised English Bible*)

It's my prayer now for us, the members of Divine Savior, Our Lady Mother of the Church and Saint Eugene, to heed Jesus' prayer and step out in faith to become one parish together. This transition we all will make is another step closer to the time when Jesus returns. We can bring our outrage, grief and anger to Jesus who heals. Jesus always listens. He's listened to me in my grief and anxiety. Because at the beginning when I heard the news we were closing, I had nowhere else to go. My prayer Jesus answered, for I have a place as associate pastor as part of our transition to the new and as of yet unnamed parish. I hope that our status as unnamed ends soon. That's too much to type each time I refer to it.

In today's gospel Jesus told us that not everyone will enter God's Kingdom when Jesus returns. Who will then enter? Jesus told us plainly; those whose faith is rooted deeply. Faith in God and faith in Jesus defines the only parameters of God's gift. As I write this I know I possess it and I know that as you read this, you have it too. That's all we need for entry into the Kingdom. Our opportunity and desire to found a new parish community in Christ is a sign that we're on our way. So as we mourn Divine Savior's passing, we have hope through faith in our future. In that we can also rejoice. Joy in Christ transcends our grief. The two are not mutually exclusive. Side by side we feel them both. Hope is also God's gift.

Our faith prevails amidst challenge, not rain, flood or wind, but the challenge in faith to find Jesus' presence amid those with whom we will gather to break bread and become one. Our faith is not established on bricks, mortar, wood or reinforced concrete but on the Rock, who is Jesus. He is the one who binds us together as our Savior and Brother.

May our burden become lighter through the Cross of Jesus.

James D. Beath
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FIRST READING: 2 Kings 24:8-17

A reading from the second Book of Kings:

Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Nehushta, daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. He did evil in the sight of the LORD, just as his forebears had done. At that time the officials of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, attacked Jerusalem, and the city came under siege. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, himself arrived at the city while his servants were besieging it. Then Jehoiachin, king of Judah, together with his mother, his ministers, officers, and functionaries, surrendered to the king of Babylon, who, in the eighth year of his reign, took him captive. And he carried off all the treasures of the temple of the LORD and those of the palace, and broke up all the gold utensils that Solomon, king of Israel, had provided in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had foretold. He deported all Jerusalem: all the officers and men of the army, ten thousand in number, and all the craftsmen and smiths. None were left among the people of the land except the poor. He deported Jehoiachin to Babylon, and also led captive from Jerusalem to Babylon the king's mother and wives, his functionaries, and the chief men of the land. The king of Babylon also led captive to Babylon all seven thousand men of the army,

and a thousand craftsmen and smiths, all of them trained soldiers. In place of Jehoiachin, the king of Babylon appointed his uncle Mattaniah king, and changed his name to Zedekiah.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 79:1b-2, 3-5, 8, 9

For the glory of your name, O Lord, deliver us.

O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple, they have laid Jerusalem in ruins. They have given the corpses of your servants as food to the birds of heaven, the flesh of your faithful ones to the beasts of the earth.

For the glory of your name, O Lord, deliver us.

They have poured out their blood like water round about Jerusalem, and there is no one to bury them. We have become the reproach of our neighbors, the scorn and derision of those around us. O LORD, how long? Will you be angry forever? Will your jealousy burn like fire?

For the glory of your name, O Lord, deliver us.

Remember not against us the iniquities of the past; may your compassion quickly come to us, for we are brought very low.

For the glory of your name, O Lord, deliver us.

Help us, O God our savior, because of the glory of your name; Deliver us and pardon our sins for your name's sake.

For the glory of your name, O Lord, deliver us.

A Reading from the Gospel according to Matthew:

Jesus said to his disciples: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?' Then I will declare to them solemnly, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.'" "Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined." When Jesus finished these words, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

The Gospel of the Lord.