

FIRST READING: Exodus 32:7-14

A reading from the Book of Exodus:

The LORD said to Moses, "Go down at once to your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, for they have become depraved. They have soon turned aside from the way I pointed out to them, making for themselves a molten calf and worshiping it, sacrificing to it and crying out, 'This is your God, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!' The LORD said to Moses, "I see how stiff-necked this people is. Let me alone, then, that my wrath may blaze up against them to consume them. Then I will make of you a great nation." But Moses implored the LORD, his God, saying, "Why, O LORD, should your wrath blaze up against your own people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with such great power and with so strong a hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent he brought them out, that he might kill them in the mountains and exterminate them from the face of the earth'? Let your blazing wrath die down; relent in punishing your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, and how you swore to them by your own self, saying, 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky; and all this land that I promised, I will give your descendants as their perpetual heritage.'" So the LORD relented in the punishment he had threatened to inflict on his people.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 106:19-20, 21-22, 23

***Remember us, O Lord, as you favor your people.***

Our fathers made a calf in Horeb and adored a molten image; They exchanged their glory for the image of a grass-eating bullock.

***Remember us, O Lord, as you favor your people.***

They forgot the God who had saved them, who had done great deeds in Egypt, Wondrous deeds in the land of Ham, terrible things at the Red Sea.

***Remember us, O Lord, as you favor your people.***

Then he spoke of exterminating them, but Moses, his chosen one, Withstood him in the breach to turn back his destructive wrath.

***Remember us, O Lord, as you favor your people.***

GOSPEL: John 5:31-47

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

Jesus said to the Jews: "If I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is not true. But there is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that the testimony he gives on my behalf is true. You sent emissaries to John, and he testified to the truth. I do not accept human testimony, but I say this so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and for a while you were content to rejoice in his light. But I have testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father gave me to accomplish, these works that I perform testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. Moreover, the Father who sent me has testified on my behalf. But you have never heard his voice nor seen his form, and you do not have his word remaining in

you, because you do not believe in the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures, because you think you have eternal life through them; even they testify on my behalf. But you do not want to come to me to have life. "I do not accept human praise; moreover, I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I came in the name of my Father, but you do not accept me; yet if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe, when you accept praise from one another and do not seek the praise that comes from the only God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father: the one who will accuse you is Moses, in whom you have placed your hope. For if you had believed Moses, you would have believed me, because he wrote about me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

The Gospel of the Lord.

### **Reflection for the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of Lent**

With today's passage from Exodus, I can only scratch my head; Moses the all merciful, all compassionate, all loving and above all, all forgiving. Is this really the message and lesson for today? If so, why believe in God and not in Moses? We have an idealized notion of the bible's source. God's eternal Word was not God's dictation to anyone. It is a collection of writings collected by people and combined in its present form. Moses was God's chosen and anointed one. He was the leader of God's people. He was the priest who served them. From his prayer and relationship to God, he revealed to them God's saving love.

For the people, he was all of those things and a hero too. The Hebrew tribes, in their Exodus, spun these tales around campfires as they kept alive their experiences in the desert. It reflects the experience of Abraham who attempted to prevent the cities of Sodom and Gomorra from destruction. He bargained with God too. Abraham and Moses were human and they were subject to fear, doubt, anger and revenge. If they were moved to compassion, mercy, love and forgiveness, what was the source of their movement? Limited human nature or the infinite, eternal and unconditional love that is God? I suspect it was the latter's good grace that accomplished good in them.

As we read the scripture stories, they unfold before us. They were not written until the wandering tribes became settled, literate and educated. The scholars collected the stories. These were memories not memoirs. The bible is a story told through eyes of faith that look back on a past and promise that unfolded to their own time. The editors knew the outcome of the scriptures; they lived it as their present. The stories were written back to front. The people made it to the Promised Land. God's fidelity proved itself as they looked into their past. God didn't destroy them for infidelity. God forgave them instead. God is great. Moses is great, only by God's grace.

I always like to tell the story of Cardinal Cody. As his health failed, before he died, a series of scandals came to light of financial misconduct. He was accused of diverting funds to help with a niece's money problems. The press lambasted him. As he lay in his hospital bed dying, he, or a close aid, wrote a letter to heap guilt on his critics. This is a paraphrase despite the quotation marks. "Of these accusations I forgive my critics; but God does not!" I met the man. He was as human as I am. This wasn't forgiveness. It was a threat of divine retribution. God's justice is forgiveness for God is love. In fact, the inverse of these stories is the truth.

Bishops, politicians, priests and other sinners are all in need of God's forgiveness; and of sinners I am foremost. The forgiveness we can offer merely shows God's gift of salvation that God has given us. Only God saves.

If Jesus had testified on his own behalf, his testimony would be untrue? Does that mean Jesus would lie? How could the pre-existent and eternal Word of God be any thing but eternal truth? The gospel of John established that in his prologue! Based on my comments for the first reading, the completed story has reached to our time. We read it with eyes of faith; we believe in God and in the Risen Jesus. Our faith is not in the man from Galilee who preached and worked wonders. Our image is not the guy next door but of the glorified Christ.

The early Church, in John's day, who wrote his gospel perhaps one hundred years after Pentecost, was becoming more and more Gentile. That most Jews failed to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, savior and eternal Word of God was a problem. In the year seventy, of the Common Era, Christians were no longer Jews in good standing. Judaism and Christianity followed diverging paths to God. John's gospel reflects this dynamic.

I like to interpret this passage in light of this passage from Matthew. "If your brother does wrong, go and take the matter up with him, strictly between yourselves. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others with you, so that every case may be settled on the evidence of two or three witnesses." (Matthew 18:15-16 The Revised English Bible) Jesus spoke from the context of his First Century Palestinian background.

Jesus, along with his ministry, had an over riding mission. Yes, he did good and powerful things. He healed the sick, the blind, deaf and possessed. He raised a few from the dead. He made food multiply and wine out of water. But the Word Made Flesh was born to suffer and die on the cross. Jesus' sacrifice of his own life for our sins was the mission for which he was born and lived. It's easy for us to forget that. We can be so enrapt with his story. We have faith and see Jesus as our savior. The people to whom Jesus spoke didn't believe in him.

Faith in God and in the one God sent, Jesus, is a gift only God will give. The fact that God did not share the gift with Jesus' audience is neither our perspective nor concern. God has given it to us. How we witness and live our faith is our concern. We need to trust God to work in God's time and way. That may be one of the best tests of our faith; our trust in God and not in chariots.

Today's stories reveal our humanity. In our humanity we can know our weakness, flaws and faults. But, as through Moses, we can know how God works and transforms human nature through grace. In Jesus we can know how God can transform human flesh into divinity. For us few things are possible; but in God there is infinity.

May God transform our lives to witness God's grace.

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