

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Mar 14th 2013

Today is Thursday in the Fourth Week of Lent. The Exodus reading is certainly appropriate for this season of the year. Lent is a time for introspection, penance, spiritual growth, “slimming down” in regard to our basic spiritual practices, and, above all, a time to focus on what is really important. Lent is comparable to Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan. Tried in the furnace, Jesus came through it all pure and true to the Father and himself.

The Exodus reading is so thoroughly Lenten because in it Moses is himself tried in the furnace and comes through the fire purified. First, I love the back and forth between God and Moses. The people have sinned against God. He has saved them and now they stab him in the back by worshipping a clump of gold made in the form of a calf. God tells Moses “Go down at once to YOUR people whom YOU brought out of the land of Egypt.” Then he suggests that the best course of action is that he destroy the people and make a great nation after starting all over again with Moses. Moses responds to God that the Israelites are “YOUR own people, whom YOU brought out of the land of Egypt.” God: they are YOUR people. Moses: Noooo, they are YOUR people. It is hilarious. Then, if this were not enough, Moses suggests that God be careful in what he does. People could get the idea that he is a devious God: you brought the Israelites out of Egypt because you really wanted to kill them somewhere else! By the way, God, you also made some promises way back there and you do not want to get a reputation as someone who welches on his promises.

Question: is the Exodus passage really about Moses shaming God into calming down, growing up, and taking responsibility for his actions? Or, is the passage about God testing Moses to see what type of leader he will be? God gives Moses the chance to pull the plug on the Israelites. They have given Moses nothing but grief. Hey, Moses, I can kill them and start over. Are you sick of them enough yet? By the way, I can really make a name for you. I will create a whole new nation out of you. Moses, though, shows himself to be a father to the nation. He loves them in spite of their sins. If Moses sounds more like God in the passage than God does, it is only because God gives him the chance to grow and to be the type of leader Israel truly needs. The psalmist says that Moses stood in the breach between the people and God’s destructive wrath. He is tried in the crucible and purified. God gives him every chance to take the easy road and he refuses.

The Gospel reading has numerous themes in it and deserves its own reflection but there is one section that relates to the Old Testament reading and the psalm. Jesus talks to the leaders of his day about the problem of leading because of the desire for human praise instead of the praise that comes from God. Moses met the standard set forth by Jesus. If he wanted to make a name for himself and receive the praise of men, he would have made different choices. But, because he loved the people of God and cared only for the praise that comes from God, even today we remember him as a great leader, a great

servant of Almighty God.

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