

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Mar 17th 2013

Next Sunday is Palm Sunday known as well as Passion Sunday. There are some annunciations for us to prepare to hear and a wonderful incarnation of God's love in this liturgy's readings. We prepare for this Lenten celebration by praying with our fractions. I heard a poem recently which stated that God made whole numbers and humans made and love fractions. These breakings seem to give us a sense of depth and control of the small things.

Our fractions or breakings or break-ups can be painful and a sense of our losing control of even the small things. We pray for God to put our pieces back together in the celebration of the Eucharist in which there is a "Fraction Rite" and a distributing of the broken, yet holy. We pray for the grace of simplicity which allows us to bring our whole, yet broken selves to be blest and put together for holy distributings.

REFLECTION

Our First Reading from the prophet Isaiah opens with one long sentence of historical intent. The "First Exodus" is being recalled to the minds of the people of Israel now in captivity in Babylon. The Word of the Lord is speaking of the events of the past, but in the present tense. God is bringing to their minds the truth that in their minds that the events of their past are present in the eyes of God. They are in exile from their homeland and the "Second Exodus" will be even greater as an identifying claim that the nation is even more God's Chosen.

In the rest of the prophesy from Isaiah, God is saying, in a sense, "That first display of my power was nothing. You ain't seen nothing yet!" In the First Exodus the waters were split so that a safe passage would be allowed. Now the opposite will take place. Where there is no water in the desert, there will be rivers and a way back home. As in the "First Exodus" the object of freedom is so that they might understand God's being their God and their response is to announce God's praise and serve that same loving God.

It is not to be forgotten by the Jews; it is a part of their saving history. This "second" is not a replacement, but an intensification of that saving love. The wild beasts will praise the creating God for their new life in the desert of fertility. The people of God are called to that same sense of grateful relating to their God of creation and salvation.

The Gospel story is a “something-new” event as well. John presents Jesus as being in the temple area and the crowds come to hear His teachings. John’s whole Gospel is a presenting of Jesus as a replacement of the temple which the Romans destroyed long after the death and resurrection of Jesus. So the setting of this story is significant and so is His teaching through this saving event.

The “old” that is, the Pharisees and scribes are attracted to Jesus, but in a negative way. They bring to Jesus a woman caught in adultery. It is a court scene and Jesus, not the woman, is on trial. The issue here is whether Jesus is of the “old” or of something “new”. The Law of Moses is the evidence and what new evidence which Jesus will provide, creates the tension. If Jesus condemns her then He is of the “old” and they win and remain the religious center for the people. If Jesus violates the Law and does something new and different, then Jesus is not only opposed to the Law, but to their being at the center.

It is significant as well for John’s theology that Jesus arrives early in the morning, at daybreak. The verses which follow this story begin with Jesus declaring that He is the “Light of the world”. This whole chapter is a discussion with the Jewish leaders about just who Jesus is. As “Light” Jesus desires to illumine their minds and hearts. This discussion continues into the next Chapter where the “Man Born Blind” is healed and they, the Jewish leaders, are pictured as being blinded by what they fail to see.

The woman of today’s Gospel is a set-up person. The Pharisees use her for their purposes as did the man who used her sexually. Jesus meets her as well as a revelation of His “new” revelational way. He frees her from the captivity of the crowd, the Pharisees and the Law. The tension of the courtroom is resolved by Jesus’ inviting her fellow-sinners to keep the Law by stoning her if they are without sin. Nobody is left to throw stones cleanly. Jesus missions her to live as loved, not used any more.

Here is what is new. Jesus is not being judicial as are the Pharisees whose interests are self-justifying performances of the Law. Jesus sends the woman back into a sense of relating as one member of the whole community. Lent, is never meant for us, to be a self-purifying season so that I merely remain more an I, self-purified and self-satisfied with my penances, mortifications, religious strictness. Lent ends with community. Lent ends with Jesus rising and gathering together those who have been untombed. Lent ends with us renewing our baptismal entrances into community. Lent ends, as with the Jews of the “Second Exodus” back in our homeland together, where we belong.

“The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.” Ps. 126

Larry Gillick, S.J.