

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” 4th Sunday of Lent -C- March 22, 1998

Joshua 5: 9a, 10-12 Psalm 34 2 Corinthians 5: 17-21 Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

First Reading: The moment of this reading is just after crossing over the Jordan River as the People enter the Promise Land. This is their first Passover in the Land. They will no longer eat Manna because they are no longer nomads, now they will eat the food from the Promise Land. So, there is a strong message here of promises fulfilled and Homecoming. I think there is a chance here to preach on the Eucharist. Like the wandering Israelites, we are still on the journey and so for us the Eucharist is Manna; a food provided to see us through this hard moment and to keep our minds fixed on the future when we will be in the presence of the Lord, a promise fulfilled.

The Eucharist is a presence with us along the journey-- but also a reminder of the absence of the Lord. It keeps us till we see the Lord face to face, and so keeps our hope nourished. The journey is arduous for us. For some it is so arduous that we need daily sustenance to get through one more day, just enough for this day. Like the Israelites, we are all involved in a birthing process. We are "passing over" to a new life; we are coming through the birth canal to be born as new beings and the process is painful. We are leaving behind a life we have known, for a future life we have not seen yet; we need to be sustained in our hope.

This Lenten Sunday we are reminded of Manna. We remember that Manna was a simple food, it was enough to nourish all the people, all could share in it. No one ate more abundantly because of their social status. No one was omitted because they were not important or productive enough. Eating the Manna united the wandering people in a common meal. It was a way of sharing so that all could live together. The Eucharist, our Manna, calls us to a better sharing in what we all need to live together. Its simplicity is also a call to frugality. In sharing the common meal of Eucharist, we recommit ourselves to seeing that all have a share in the nourishment they need to live. This “food” is not just physical, but includes such essentials as good housing, education, security, etc. Thus, as we receive our Eucharist today, our “Manna in the desert”, we are challenged to a simpler lifestyle, to frugality, and to care for the earth’s resources so that we all can share

in them and that there will always be enough for all.

The Second Reading: This too has images of "passing over"; we are being born anew, not just by our own efforts at self renewal or improvement, but through a personal transformation that is beyond our own ability. Paul reminds us that the new Creation is not our own doing, but done by God through Christ. I think of the "before and after" pictures in magazines where people lose weight or have a "makeover" done. The transformation of Christ is more profound than this. It is not just a surface change, a "sprucing-up", a learning of rules of etiquette and proper behavior.

The greatest sign of this new order is when reconciliation is at work. And we are ministers of this reconciliation. Where does reconciliation need to take place in my own life? What role do I need to play, in light of the fact that God has already done the work of reconciling me to God? What about the need for reconciliation in the church community? What are the signs of reconciliation I see around me? What are signs of a need for reconciliation in our community? Paul saw himself as an ambassador of God's reconciliation; his life and mission were "sacramental." If you have access to information on the reconciliation process that is now going on in South Africa, I think this would be a wonderful example of the profound sacrifice reconciliation requires. It really does call for a profound transforming grace. The "Truth And Reconciliation Commission", under Bishop Tutu, is giving amnesty to former criminals from the apartheid era. But to receive the pardons, they must confess their wrongdoings in great detail. And the families and friends, as well as the entire country has a chance to hear what criminal acts were done during those awful years of terror. After the confessions are given, to the satisfaction of the Commission, the government grants the guilty an amnesty. This process seems to be effecting a healing that might not have happened otherwise in the country.

Difficult phrase in this reading: God made Christ "to be sin." Could mean that God willed Jesus to be in full solidarity with us and in full subjection to the consequences of sin. Thus, humanity in turn could share in his final obedience and we could become holy through him.

The Gospel is the familiar Prodigal Son. Maybe two stories will help in this preaching. Art Linkletter had a tv show years ago. The show featured practical

jokes played on people. One time they sent telegrams to people in 50 cities that said, “All has been found out. Flee!” Then they watched to see what happened. 50% of the recipients of the telegrams headed for airports and bus terminals.

Here’s another one told by Donald Mc Cullough in “The Trivialization of God” (1995).

“Ernest Hemingway once told a story to illustrate the popularity of the Spanish name Paco. A father, he said, journeyed to Madrid to put an ad in the local paper: PACO MEET ME AT HOTEL MONTANA NOON WEDNESDAY ALL IS FORGIVEN . PAPA. The next day the authorities had to muster a squadron of the Guardia Civil to disperse the mob of 800 young men who massed on the street in front of the inn.

“So we stand: at the front door of the inn, hoping against hope that we are forgiven. And the Word of the Gospel tells us that yes, we are called by a Father who has been waiting for our return and that we are now bidden to come in and be seated at the banquet table. A ring is placed on our fingers and robes around our shoulders and sandals on our feet. The fatted calf is killed, the musicians are cutting loose, and the guests are getting down with some serious dancing.

“The guest? We suddenly realize that all the other Pacos [and Francescas and Johns and Marys] have also been invited, that the Father has welcomed every prodigal home from the far country.”

(Sorry I can’t give the citation of the article from I got this quote. All I’ve got in my notes is the quote and the book title the article quoted.)

ONE HELPFUL PUBLICATION FOR THE PREACHER:

The Archdiocese of Newark, NJ publishes a quarterly liturgical newsletter, “Word and Worship”. A one year subscription of 4 issues is \$10 (\$13.50 foreign). To begin your subscription call (973) 497-4345) or write the Worship Office, PO Box 9500, Newark, NJ 07104-9500.

QUOTABLE:

More and more we are rediscovering that the basic spirituality common to us all is that at baptism we were washed clean by the blood of the Lamb. This is what bonds us together: John Paul II, Mother Teresa, Thomas

Merton, our parents, our pastor, ourselves! Sometimes priests and deacons preaching at a Mass where baptism is celebrated feel they must come up with a special “baptismal homily” geared to the occasion. Why so? Preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the children being disciplined to the Lord. Otherwise we run the risk of extrinsicism, as if baptism belongs on the fringe of Christian existence rather than mainstream to our following of Christ....

Liturgical feasts and seasons are not a static ordering of time, but a road map for people on a journey, a pilgrimage of faith to God. In this regard Lent/Easter is a season of baptismal conversion and renewal: a time for initiating new members through the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*; a time for rejuvenating those already initiated by the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and first eucharist. The season of Lent itself might be perceived as a baptismal retreat for those preparing for the initiation sacraments at the Easter Vigil. One can expand this image so as to envision Lent as a mission/retreat for the whole parish community: the acceptance of ashes on Ash Wednesday is an acceptance of this call to prepare to renew our baptismal promises at Easter.

(Rev. Charles W. Gusmer, quoted in “Word and Worship”,
Newsletter of the Worship Office, Archdiocese of Newark, NJ, Fall,
1997

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. CD Available: “FIRST IMPRESSIONS: PREACHING REFLECTIONS ON LITURGICAL YEAR C” This compilation, from past “First Impressions,” includes two reflections on almost all Sundays and major feasts for this liturgical year. For more information and to purchase go to: <http://judeop.ispraleigh.com/>
2. I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use “First Impressions” in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. (Judeop@Juno.com)
3. Our webpage address: <http://judeop.ispraleigh.com/>

(Where you will find “Preachers’ Exchange,” which includes "First Impressions" and “Homilias Dominicales,” as well as articles, book reviews and quotes pertinent to preaching.)

4. “Homilias Dominicales”-- these Spanish reflections are written by three friars of the Southern Dominican Province, Leobardo Almazan, Juan Torres, OP , Wilmo Candanedo, OP and two Dominican sisters, Regina Mc Carthy, OP and Doris Regan, OP. Like “First Impressions”, “Homilias Dominicales” are a preacher’s early reflections on the upcoming Sunday readings and liturgy. So, if you or a friend would like to receive “Homilias Dominicales” drop a note to John Boll, O.P. at: Jboll@opsouth.org or jboll@preacherexchange.org

5. "First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, send a note to John Boll at the above Email address.

DONATIONS

If you would like to support this ministry, please send tax deductible contributions to Jude Siciliano, O.P., whose address is listed below. Make checks to: Dominican Friars of Raleigh. Or, go to our webpage to make an online donation: <http://judeop.ispraleigh.com>

Thank you.

Blessings on your preaching,

Jude Siciliano, O.P., Promoter of Preaching, Southern Dominican Province, USA
P.O. Box 12927, Raleigh, N.C. 27605, (919) 833-1893, Email: judeop@juno.com