



## The Word...

In those days, the LORD said:  
"The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great,  
and their sin so grave, that I must go down  
and see whether or not their actions  
fully correspond to the cry against them that comes to me.  
I mean to find out"  
(*Gn 18:20-32*).

## Pondering the Word...

No one has ever asked me for advice on the lectionary. I doubt anyone ever will. But if I had a say in this, I'd like to change the gospel reading today to one we've heard a few times recently. As Jesus sends the disciples out to share the Good News (Mt 10:5-15/Lk 10:1-12), he tells them, *"Whoever will not receive you or listen to your words...Amen, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for those towns."*

There are reams of scholarship and debate about the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah: is it strictly seen as sexual sin? Or is it that the townspeople are set on using the guests cruelly and inhospitably (*"let us have our way with them"* as contrasted with Abraham's welcome and hospitality to these same visitors)? These were thought to be wealthy towns, so is it the gross excess of the residents that damns them? For the sake of our reflection, it doesn't matter. What matters is Jesus tells us that as egregious as the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah are, the sin of rejecting the Good News will merit a harsher judgment.

## Living the Word...

Lots to unpack here: first, who were the people crying out to God about the sins they witnessed? Maybe Lot and his family? (They were immigrants, and it appears their voices were dismissed—imagine that!) Whoever they were, they were willing to take a risk to call out the evil they saw happening all around them. Are we?

What is the Good News of Jesus the disciples were sent to proclaim? *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord"* (Lk 4:18-19, from Is 61). As disciples sent out by Jesus, is this the message we proclaim? Or is it more like, "You'd better believe in Jesus and follow all the rules or get ready for fire and brimstone?" Do we proclaim the mercy and love of God through our actions and treatment of the poor, the immigrant, and the oppressed, or do we dismiss their voices? Do we work for justice, or do we just mouth the words? And this might be the toughest question of all: do we truly accept God's forgiveness by forgiving ourselves and others, sometimes of egregious sin? For some, the harsher judgment Jesus refers to is read about in Revelations. For me, the more painful result will come from my own recognition that I have refused to accept and proclaim the Good News of love and mercy. What do you think?

## Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

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**Mon, Jul 28:** Aaron replied, "Let not my lord be angry. You know well enough how prone the people are to evil. They said to me, 'Make us a god to be our leader...' So, I told them, 'Let anyone who has gold jewelry take it off.' They gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and this calf came out" (Ex 32:15-24, 30-34). "Aaron...buddy, what the heck are you talking about!? You sound like some elected leaders, quick to pin the blame on someone else and making up bizarre stories to explain wrongdoing!" Was this the kind of leader the Israelites wanted? Is this the kind of leader *we* want? **Provision: Whom do you follow?** Compare Aaron to his brother Moses who is willing to go down with the ship if God won't forgive the Israelites, or to Jesus: "Father, forgive them..." Maybe Aaron was just fearful of the people, but is that what we look for in those who lead us? Might this be an impetus for you to reflect on the type of people you elect or choose to follow?

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**Tue, Jul 29:** Moses said, "If I find favor with you, O LORD, do come along in our company" (Ex 33:7-11; 34:5-9, 28). **Provision: Invite God to "come along!"** Isn't this a great prayer! Moses invites God to just come along! It's so genuine, so simple. I bet God really likes this kind of prayer. Instead of "God, please do this and such for me," or even, "God, you are so great!" we say, 'Loving God, I am so grateful for your presence in my life. Be with me as I go about my day...as I take this journey...as I start this project or class or new job.' I think that just by saying a prayer like this, we find favor in God's eyes. Give it a try!

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**Wed, Jul 30:** When Aaron and the children of Israel saw Moses and noticed how radiant the skin of his face had become, they were afraid to come near him" (Ex 34:29-35). The people were afraid of radiance, afraid of the light. Typically, we think of those who beam with joy as being like magnets, people we want to be with to understand the source of their radiance. But, when we find out their radiant joy comes from an intimate relationship with God, we may shy away and even avoid them. We don't see ourselves as capable of that kind of relationship or of putting in the commitment it might entail. **Provision: Don't be afraid of God's light.** It is true: once God's radiance takes hold, it is impossible to turn away. In Peter's words, "To whom shall we go?" We only desire to sink deeper into the light. But it is nothing to fear. God will acclimate the eyes of our souls and invite us gently to come closer. There's a reason "Don't be afraid" is the most oft-repeated phrase in Scripture.

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**Thurs, Jul 31:** "Then every scribe who has been instructed in the Kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old" (Mt 13:47-53). In the Roman tradition, this is the feast day of St. Ignatius of Loyola, my go-to guy whose spiritual exercises help lead me to that personal relationship we mentioned yesterday. He's a good example of one who brought from the storeroom of faith both the new and the old. Some of the new stuff didn't sit too well with the Inquisition, so he spent time in prison. But his passion for learning of and experiencing the deep mercy and mystery of God, the God of Abraham and Isaac, the God of the prophets, the God of Jesus could not be suppressed. **Provision: Don't let the light be suppressed.** To celebrate Ignatius, do a review (an examen) of your day: Where did you see radiance and light today? Did you see God in a new light? Did you embrace the light or shy away? Were you able to find the light in what appeared to be dark? Were you a source of light for others? Thank God for divine light!

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**Fri, Aug 1:** Jesus came to his native place... and they took offense at him... he did not work many mighty deeds there because of their lack of faith (Mt 13: 54-58). When I was a kid, I remember thinking, "Ha! Good for you, Jesus. You really showed them!" It appealed to my childish view of justice and vengeful image of God. But as I grew in understanding, I realized I had it all wrong: Jesus is never about revenge; he is always about faith. **Provision: Open your eyes of faith.** "He saw their faith." "It is your faith that has healed you." "Do you believe I can do this for you?" The common thread in miracle stories is people's faith. Jesus' power is not dependent on faith, but we cannot be open to everyday miracles without eyes of faith. Look around today: what miracles do you see?

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**Sat, Aug 2:** "May God grant us grace and bless us, may He shine His face upon us" (Ps 67, Hebrew). Here's that image of a shining face again. I am reminded of this passage when I look at the radiant face of a baby, so new, still so reflective of God's grace and light! **Provision: Imagine God's face shining upon you.** What does that look and feel like? For some, this graceful image can be found in nature or in the varied colors and beauty of human faces. What brings forth in you this image of God's radiance? Call it to mind when things are challenging or difficult. And yes, let's pray fervently for all the nations to heed God's call to love.