

Homily
March 10, 2024
4th Sunday of Lent
20:32 – 31:25

You might have noticed that as we grow up from teenagers into adults, that during that period of time we question a lot of things. We especially question the authority of our parents and whether or not they're idiots. Or we question some of their behaviors, the ones that (you know) are not the most attractive behaviors. We try to sum them up in that way. And we say, "I'll never be like that!" "I'll never do that." (Chuckling...) And then we realize later on, "I'm just like my mother." "I'm just like my father." In many ways.

Now, that's not a bad thing, really. I mean, all of us are a summation of all the people who have influenced us, especially our parents, our grandparents, our teachers – the ones who have inspired us to do something marvelous or different or fulfilling. But we have to come to the conclusion that even the flaws are a part of us and they helped us to become who we are.

Second Chronicles is the source of our First Reading. – First and Second Chronicles are basically, "Let's tell the story all over again." Because if you read First and Second Kings, and then you read Second Chronicles, you go, "We already said that."

But the authors say it in a somewhat different way and in a different period of time. So the vision that they have going into it is a little different.

First and Second Chronicles lay out the relationship with the Lord from David through the Exile. Our reading today is the conclusion of Chapter 36 of Second Chronicles. As it concludes, there is a constant descending of that relationship, going from the high point of David and Solomon, their rule and their power and the wonder of their kingdom, to the point where it all disintegrates.

Why? Well, the reading tells us. The royalty, the priests and all of the people had descended into bad behaviors that not only undermined the fabric of the nation and the Kingdom, but undermined their relationship with God. They were not living the Kingdom. They were not living the Covenant.

And so, as we heard, as a result of their descent into this, the logical thing happens. They're conquered and they're carried off. Their political power, their nation, it's gone. And all of those who were healthy enough and had influence or wealth or who were the artisans, they were all carried off to Babylon. And what was left behind? The widows, the orphans, the old and the infirm.

Seventy years this Exile lasted. And then, God came up with a marvelous surprise. A Gentile, the King of Persia (which is modern-day Iran) freed them and sent them home to resume worship of God in the Temple that they were going to rebuild.

A Gentile! It wasn't a David figure. It wasn't one of their own. It was a foreigner who didn't believe in this God, and yet became God's instrument. Why did this happen? Because God's enduring love never ceased. God's enduring love never ceased.

He was the first to create. He was the first to enter into Covenants with Creation, Noah, Abraham, David. Who'd I leave out. Moses! Oh yeah, him. God was the one who acted first and in his love, he continued to act.

So, they go home. And we know the Post-Exilic stories, the rebuilding, etc. Because God was faithful.

Which takes us to our Gospel reading, where there is another surprise. God's own son comes into the world, pitches his tent among his own people, and lives among them. He

eventually has this encounter in John's Gospel with Nicodemus, who is a member of the religious elite. And we know the passage: John 3:16.

Have you ever seen someone at a sporting event hold up "3:16"? You haven't? Have you? You have. Did you know what it meant? It wasn't the time of day. Most people don't know what it means. It's what we heard. "God so loved the world that he sent his only son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him."

God acted first. Why? Out of love.

Trace through John's Gospel, noting the wonder of God's love in Christ as he continues the journey toward the glory of the Cross, followed by the Resurrection and the gift of eternal life. It was all in love. A gift of love.

It was a gift.

Which takes us to the Second Reading, Paul's wonderful passage from Ephesians. You can't earn it. Salvation is a free gift.

Any works that we do, Paul says, must come forth from our thankfulness for the gift. Yeah! It's hard for us at times to accept that. Because either we were raised thinking that we had to do everything right, to earn Salvation. Or someone told us that God's "gonna getcha." And turned God into the Boogeyman. Or Bogeyman, I'm never quite sure how to spell it.

God so loved the world. Paul says that out of that love we are given the gift of salvation in Christ. And then we are to spend our lives responding to the gift. He says it very clearly, *Your works are not what's going to save you. Your works are a response.*

Do you see the thread through the three readings?

God acts first, out of love.

God is faithful.

We who are in Covenant with God are invited to accept the gift and then to respond.

But how we do that is not, as Paul hints at – *Oh well, I'm going to go out and do this good deed and I'm going to earn a few points.* What? Have we got a card of points here, building up value? – No, he says that's not it. It is thankful response.

So, brothers and sisters, as we go about doing good works this week, before you do it - before I do it - think of it as a thankful response first and foremost, to God in Christ -- and the Christ we would find in the person or persons who receive the work. Then, spend the rest of your lives trying to absorb this truth: the gift that God has given us in Christ Jesus our Lord.