

Lent 5 - Passion Sunday

Morning Prayer A

First Lesson: Isa 1:10-20

Second Lesson: 1 Pet 4:12-19

Homily

Did today's two lessons shake you up?

They should have.

Both of them are severe and demanding.

There isn't anything comfortable,

(in the sense that we usually use the word)

in either one of them,

and they are both addressed to God's own people.

There's not a word in either passage

intended for the open and obvious sinner,

not a single message for the unbeliever.

It's all for religious folk,

for the called and chosen,

for those who claim to follow God,

for us.

We're Christians.

We've been baptized.

We've heard the Word of God.

We come to worship Him regularly.

We are convinced that our version of the Faith

is the best available.

In fact, this parish exists because of commitment to a vision of truth they've lost somewhere else.

We can easily get comfortable.

We can easily feel superior.

We can spend all our time criticizing others,

while we are doing everything just right,

and God pats us on the back and says, "well done," right? Not so!

Notice, in the words of Isaiah,

what God calls his very own people:

He calls them Sodom.

He calls them Gomorrah.

He likens them to the worst of sinners.

These are people who are faithful

in keeping sabbaths and new moons

and assemblies and feasts,

who are diligent in offering sacrifice,

in spreading their hands in prayer.

Good God-fearing people we might think,

but God says to them:

"I see sins, red as crimson,

I see rebellion,

I see the doing of evil,

I am tired of the prayers of a people

who neither hear nor obey My voice.

Wash yourselves. Repent.

Learn to do well, Make a fresh start.
 Remember the needy. Reach out in love.
*If ye be willing and obedient,
 ye shall eat the good of the land:
 But if ye refuse and rebel,
 ye shall be devoured with the sword:
 for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."*

To those who hear Him, he says this:
*"...though your sins be as scarlet,
 they shall be as white as snow;
 though they be red like crimson,
 they shall be as wool."*

This is Passion Sunday.
 How appropriate that we should think upon
 the precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 with which we are washed and made clean,
 with which we are touched in prayer,
 and in hearing the Word of God,
 but most especially in the Holy Eucharist.

But even to the most faithful of Christians,
 St. Peter has sobering words.
 "Don't be surprised when you suffer;
 don't be disappointed when things
 just aren't what you want them to be,
 as if it were some kind of strange thing.

Rejoice! Be glad!
 You've been given a priceless opportunity
 to share in the Passion of Christ Himself."

In the Eucharist in union with
"the one sacrifice of Himself once offered,"
 we *"offer and present ... our selves,
 our souls and bodies
 to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice ..."*

Are we to be surprised or displeased
 when he takes us up on our offer?

"Why me?" we cry, "I don't deserve this!"
 but that's where we err --

We do deserve this, and far more --
*"All have sinned and come short of the glory of
 God,"*
 and *"The wages of sin is death."* said St. Paul.

We deserve worse than anything we receive;
 even though we tend to see our own sins as tolerable,
 God does not. To sin is to deny Him,
 and to put ourselves in His place.
 we do not deserve to live at all,
 but as the Apostle continued,
"The gift of God is eternal life,

through Jesus Christ our Lord."

His gift is eternal life. Why?

Because He wants us

Messed up and soiled as we are, He wants us.

He doesn't really want us just to do the right things.

Our religious observances and our good works
are right things to do,

but they aren't what He wants.

He wants our hearts. He wants our love.

He wants us to be His hands in this world

We are forgiven.

Lent teaches us how to live that out.

Let us pray,

in the words of St. Richard of Chichester:

Day by day, O Dear Lord, three things I pray:

to see thee more clearly,

to love thee more dearly,

to follow thee more nearly,

day by day. Amen.

Lent 5 - Passion Sunday

Morning Prayer B

First Lesson: Deut 18:15-22

Second Lesson: Luke 20:9-18

Homily

Somewhat oddly, we call today Passion Sunday. We aren't reading one of the Passion narratives out of the Gospels.

Next week on Palm Sunday we read one of them, and the rest on various days of the following week.

Passion Week is not when we remember, step by step, the elements of Christ's passion.

That also is next week, which we call Holy Week.

We call this Passion Sunday, and we celebrate it by covering up our crosses, by concealing our symbols of His Passion.

Why should this be?

It might be useful to think in terms of mystery, of a world-shaking mystery veiled from view.

In the Mass of today, the Gospel (from the end of St. John 8)

describes scholars and officials who see only a man, a rather ordinary man, who seems to be making enormous claims.

They question Him and He speaks with authority. they observe his youth ("not yet fifty," they said), and he says, "Before Abraham was, I am."

How could this be? This is an ordinary man.

As we watch His death in Holy Week, it is the rather gruesome death of what appears to be no more than an ordinary man.

No wonder these leaders were scandalized. They decided that He had to die.

He lived among us.

He looked like one of us.

He sounded like one of us.

He ate and drank, just like the rest of us.

Indeed He was one of us, but ...

He claimed to be more.

He was and is more.

and what appeared in plain sight

was far less than the whole truth.

Who was this strange, yet ordinary man?

What lay behind this ordinary appearance?

That's what Passion Sunday is about,

not really about the Passion itself,

but about why it was about to happen.

Deuteronomy speaks of a people
making a strange request:

*"Let me not hear again
the voice of the LORD my God,
neither let me see this great fire any more,
that I die not."*

They were afraid. They should have been.
God is quoted as saying that they had well spoken.
You see, they were unworthy.
They knew they were unworthy.
They were afraid to come directly into God's
presence.

That's realistic.
So many today think of God
as a benevolent teddybear,
that they can hug any time
and feel so safe and so warm.
At the Great Judgment it will not be that way.
We'll know we have no right to be there.
We'll know what we deserve,
But ...

There was to be a mysterious Prophet,
more than a prophet,
whose words would be God's words,

whose presence would be the approach
to the presence of God,
a Mediator.

and we know that to be Christ,
and we know that He,
the Divine and human Prophet,
the Son of God,
would be despised and rejected
by those He came to save.

In the parable we heard today,
the master sends messenger after messenger,
and the rebellious tenants refuse the message.
That is the history of the world.
Finally he sends his own son,
and they kill him.
And so it was, and so it is.

Jesus came unto His own,
and His own received Him not.
He came, divinity veiled in a human nature, and
they neither knew Him, nor wanted to know Him,
and they killed Him.

And we too, with less excuse.
We know Him, and profess to believe Him.
We've been baptized into Him,
and we come to church to be fed by Him,

with Himself,
and yet we reject Him, we refuse His word.
We sin. We justify our own actions.
We condemn others for theirs.
As we so often pray,
we have sinned,
and there is no health in us.

But, veiled in flesh, God is among us.
He calls. He loves. He wants us.
As we draw near to the Holy Week
in which we remember His Passion,
his saving work, and His Resurrection,
can we hear Him?
Can we heed His call?
Beyond the veil, wrapped in mystery,
the Savior awaits us.

Let us pray:

O Saviour of the world,
who by thy Cross and precious Blood hath redeemed
us,
save us and help us,
we humbly beseech thee, O Lord.
May we see thee.
May we hear thee.
May we heed thy loving call. Amen.

Lent 5 - Passion Sunday

Evening Prayer A

First Lesson: Hosea 6:1-6

Second Lesson: Heb 10:1-25

Homily

Listen again
to some of the words of the Prophet Hosea"

*"Come, and let us return unto the LORD:
for he hath torn, and he will heal us;
he hath smitten, and he will bind us up."*

Wait just a minute!
HE hath torn? He hath smitten?
But isn't God a God of love?
Doesn't He call us to come just as we are?
Well, yes, He does, just as we are.
You don't clean yourself up in order to take a
shower,
It doesn't work that way.
You come to the shower with all the dirt and crud,
but you don't come to the shower
expecting to stay dirty.
You come to get clean, don't you?
You come to God filthy dirty, covered with sin.

When you come to him
you're not fit for civilized heavenly company,
you come to him to get clean,
and He does whatever it takes to get you clean,
and sometimes it hurts.
He scrubs. He pokes and prods.
Sometimes a bit of surgery is necessary
to get the contagion out.
But, when He's done hurting you, because it had to
be done,
He binds your wounds and heals you.

He goes on:

*"After two days will he revive us:
in the third day he will raise us up,
and we shall live in his sight."*

Did you hear that?
Just like Jesus. Dead, but risen on the third day.
That was long before Jesus' times,
but do you think this is accidental?
Don't you think God inspired that to be said
for us Christians to hear? It looks that way.

He cleans us up. He heals us and gives us new life.
Then what? It's as he said:

*"...for your goodness is as a morning cloud,
and as the early dew it goeth away."*

Our good intentions vanish.
We get dirty all over again.
and once again he quotes God:

*"Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets;
I have slain them by the words of my mouth: "*

Have you heard anything from Scripture this Lent
that made you go, "Uh, oh!"
that made you tremble a bit,
that made you know that you don't measure up?
You should have.
That's what Lent is for.
We have "Comfortable Words" built into the liturgy.
There certainly is "comfort" in the Scriptures,
both in the modern sense of "soothing,"
and in the older sense of "strengthening".
But Scripture is full of Uncomfortable Words,
words that bite, that hurt,
words that make us squirm.
sometimes in guilt, sometimes in pain.
We are guilty, and there is no way to wiggle out of
it.

The law kills.

It makes us aware of our sin.
It shows us the fate we have surely earned.
And it shows us how helpless we have really
become.
Keeping rules, knowing doctrines,
going to church, even doing works of mercy,
won't earn us freedom from our guilt.
It's not something we can do.
But ...
We have a high priest.
He offered the one true and holy Sacrifice
for the sins of the world, for our sins.
He died on the cross for us,
descended into hell for us,
and rose from the dead for us.
He has called us through the waters of Baptism.
He feeds us, in union with His Sacrifice,
at His altar-table at Communion.
He sends His Holy Spirit to fill us and guide us.
He calls us, again and again, back from our sins,
to repentance and new forgiveness,
and, as we heard in our second lesson:

*"...having an high priest over the house of God;
Let us draw near with a true heart
in full assurance of faith,
having our hearts sprinkled
from an evil conscience,*

*and our bodies washed with pure water.
 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith
 without wavering;
 (for he is faithful that promised;)
 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love
 and to good works:
 Not forsaking
 the assembling of ourselves together,
 as the manner of some is;
 but exhorting one another:
 and so much the more,
 as ye see the day approaching.*

Let us pray.

O thou to whose all-searching sight
 The darkness shineth as the light,
 Search, prove my heart; it longs for thee;
 O burst these bonds, and set it free.

Wash out its stains, refine its dross,
 Nail my affections to the cross;
 Hallow each thought; let all within,
 Be clean, as thou, my Lord, art clean.

Saviour, where'er thy steps I see,
 Dauntless, untired, I follow thee:
 O let thy hand support me still,
 And lead me to thy holy hill. Amen.

Lent 5 - Passion Sunday

Evening Prayer B

First Lesson: Jer 14:7-21

Second Lesson: John 10:17-38

Homily

From the First Lesson:

*"...thou, O LORD, art in the midst of us,
and we are called by thy name;
leave us not. "*

Jeremiah, while presenting strong words to a people who were rejecting the Lord their God, testified to His deep faith that, even so, God was present, and hearing prayer.

Jesus, in the Second Lesson, very much present in the midst of the leaders of a later generation of the same people, spoke the Word of God in strong terms, and they *"...took up stones again to stone him."*

Today's readings are not addressed to unbelievers, but to God's own chosen people. This is His word to us. Let's listen to Him.

God is in the midst of His people.
He always is.
His voice is always there to be heard.
In Scripture, in the writings of Tradition, in the preaching and teaching of devout and Spirit-filled men, in the depths of enlightened conscience, in the sacraments He has given us, in more ways than we can count.
He speaks.
His Word does not change.

He demands holiness.
He expects obedience.
To those who follow He speaks promise. promise far beyond what we could hope for.
To those who do not, well ... we know what He speaks to them, and it is words no one ever wants to hear.

And yet ...
If there is one thing always true of God's people, it is that His people are not very faithful. Over and over again His people have listened more closely to the words of the world around them, have paid more attention to what gives them pleasure,

have ignored the clear standards He has given them.
 It was true in Jeremiah's day.
 It was true when Our Lord walked on the earth.
 It is true today.
 We've all noticed how true it is
 of most of the major Christian denominations,
 after all, that's why we are Continuing Anglicans,
 and not still in that other church.
 But this is not a message for us to look at them,
 whatever "them" we might have in mind,
 but for us to look at us.

Lent is for good solid self-examination.
 Am I, as an individual, or my church as a body,
 really listening to the Lord?
 Is His voice and His will my first concern?
 What would I rather have, my own comfort,
 or what I know to be God's will?
 These are not idle questions.

He has redeemed us.
 He has called us to be His own.
 We have been through the waters of Baptism.
 We have partaken of His Body and Blood.
 We have heard His Word read and preached.
 Has it made a difference in the way we live?
 In the way we think?
 In the way we treat other people?

If we're honest, we'll need to admit,
 "Well, not really,"
 and, as it has been said,
 partial obedience is no obedience at all.

*"Hast thou utterly rejected Judah?
 hath thy soul loathed Zion? "*
 cried Jeremiah,
*"why hast thou smitten us,
 and there is no healing for us?"*
 The reason was not hard to find for them,
 and it's not harder in our case.
 We deserve the same.
*"we looked for peace, and there is no good;
 and for the time of healing, and behold trouble! "*
 They wanted all that on their own terms
 and wouldn't accept God's plan.
 We need to go on, as he did:
*"We acknowledge, O LORD, our wickedness,
 and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned
 against thee.
 Do not abhor us, for thy name's sake ..."*

He is in our midst, calling to us,
 and, as Jesus said,

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them,
 and they follow me:*

*And I give unto them eternal life;
and they shall never perish,
neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*

May we always hear Him, and obey.

Let us pray.

Grant, Lord, that we, who are thy people, having repented of our sins and having received thy forgiveness, may be attentive unto thy voice, that we may hear thee, and follow thee, unto life everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.