

FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

6th -10th March 2023

Second Week of Lent

Collect for the Second Week of Lent

O GOD, who have commanded us to listen to your beloved Son, be pleased, we pray, to nourish us inwardly by your word, that, with spiritual sight made pure, we may rejoice to behold your glory. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Monday in the Second Week of Lent

Reading

Matthew 5:13-16 (RSV)

Salt and Light

Jesus said to his disciples: ¹³You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.

¹⁴You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Reflection

SCIENCE tells us that in fact salt does not lose its taste but, as the Roman first century naturalist and philosopher, Pliny the Elder, remarked in his *Natural History*, it can become adulterated and weakened. Pliny's views would be known at the time and the importance of salt was talked about in the Old Testament, giving taste (Job 6:6), and for preserving and as a part

of sacrifice (Lev 2:13; Ezek 43:24). We perhaps forget how, until modern times, salt was a rarity and a luxury, hence the highly ornate salt cellars which used to be the centre piece of the tables of the rich. It does not require very much thought for us to reflect on what Jesus is asking of us when he tells his disciples that they should be 'the salt of the earth'. As for the 'light of the world', again there is more to this than the obvious meaning of the image. Israel is invited to 'walk in the light of the Lord' (Is 2:5) and be a 'light to the nations' (Is 42:6; 49:6). It is a theme to which St Luke brings emphasis (Lk 2:32; Acts 13:47; 26:23) and which is emphasised by St Paul (Rom 2:19). It perhaps goes without saying that, being called to be 'salt and light', we Christians are being invited to live in an attractive way which leads others to 'see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father who is in heaven.'

Tuesday in the Second Week of Lent

Reading

Isaiah 1:10,16-20 (RSV)

Learn to do good, search for justice

10 Hear the word of the LORD,
you rulers of Sodom!
Give ear to the teaching of our God,
you people of Gomor'rah!....

16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,

17 learn to do good;
seek justice,
correct oppression;
defend the fatherless,
plead for the widow.

18 'Come now, let us reason together,
says the LORD:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.

19 If you are willing and obedient,

you shall eat the good of the land;
²⁰ but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be devoured by the sword;
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'

Reflection

THIS passage, from the beginning of the Book of Isaiah, relates to Isaiah, son of Amoz, a prophet in Jerusalem in the eighth century BC, working at much the same time as Hosea and Amos but in the Southern Kingdom rather than the North. Jerusalem, says the prophet, is experiencing a disaster as a punishment for unfaithfulness to the covenant. Temple worship is futile because the people are not living moral lives and are committing great injustices. But, says the Lord through his prophet, turning away from sin is still possible, and the sins of the people, though they are like scarlet, can be white as snow, if only the people turn to the Lord. This 'turning' is the essence of the Greek word *metanoia*, the word in the New Testament for repentance, and Lent is very much a time for examining the direction which we are facing and making the necessary adjustments, whether slight or drastic. Jerusalem needed a drastic re-orientation. So, it would seem, does our Western society, and this time is for the world a kind of secular Lent. We play our part most by examining and refocusing our own lives.

Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent

Reading

Matthew 20:17-28 (RSV)

A Third Time Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

¹⁷ And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, ¹⁸ 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, ¹⁹ and deliver him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.'

The Request of the Mother of James and John

²⁰ Then the mother of the sons of Zeb'edee came up to him, with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. ²¹ And he said to her, 'What do you want?' She said to him, 'Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.' ²² But Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?' They said to him, 'We are able.' ²³ He said to them, 'You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.' ²⁴ And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. ²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; ²⁸ even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

Reflection

THIS, the third of the predictions of the Passion in St Matthew, gives us a perspective different from the similar passage in St Mark. In St Matthew's account, Jesus is clearly deciding to head towards Jerusalem. This is the final journey, a journey which began at Caesarea Philippi with Peter's confession of faith and will end with the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. We have more detail than we had in the first two predictions of the Passion (Mt 16:21; 17:22-23). Now, the handing over to the chief priests is foretold (Mt 26:57), as is their condemnation (Mt 26:66), the handing over to the Romans (Mt 27:2), the mocking, scourging, and crucifixion (Mt 27:26-30; 27:32-44) and the Resurrection (Mt 28:1-10). The amazement and fear of the disciples which we encounter in St Mark's version of the story (Mk 10:32) is omitted.

The request of the Mother of James and John corresponds to a similar passage in St Mark (Mk 10:35ff) but in St Mark it is the disciples themselves, rather than their mother, who make the outrageous request. It is outrageous not just because it is jockeying for position – which is the very thing which runs counter to the teaching of Jesus – but because it completely misunderstands how things will be in the Kingdom of Heaven. In both accounts – Matthew and Mark – Jesus confronts James and John with what faces them – the cup of suffering. So we not only discover how the way ahead is likely to work out, consonant with the vocation of Israel to be God's suffering servant, but we also find emphasised the underlying

Kingdom values 'whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave' (Mt 20:26-27).

Thursday in the Second Week of Lent

Reading

Luke 16:19-31 (RSV)

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Jesus said to the Pharisees: ¹⁹ 'There was a rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Laz'arus, full of sores, ²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried; ²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Laz'arus in his bosom. ²⁴ And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Laz'arus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.' ²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Laz'arus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' ²⁷ And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹ But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹ He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead.'"

Reflection

THE GOSPEL reading is the Parable of Dives and Lazarus, a parable found only in St Luke's Gospel. Though popularly known as 'Dives', the Latin for 'rich man', the parable does not name him. He is 'a certain rich man' and it is the 'certain poor man' who is dignified with a name. 'Lazarus' - in Greek *Elieker* - meaning 'My God helps' - is the name of the poor man. Echoing in our ears as we hear this parable is the first of the Beatitudes in St Luke's version: 'Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God'

(Lk 6:20b). Purple dye was available only to the wealthy and so, of course, was fine linen. We find similar descriptions of the well-to-do in Judg 8:26; Sir 45:10; Esth 2:6; 8:15). 'Abraham's bosom' is the normal English phrase, though 'bosom' does not quite do the trick. The word is literally 'lap' but the sense is of being gathered to, enfolded with, one's ancestors. Though it is found only in Luke, a similar idea is common in the Old Testament (Gen 49:33; Num 27:13; Deut 32:50; Judg 2:10). Abraham of course is the original ancestor. Whereas Lazarus ends up in the bosom of Abraham, Dives finds himself in Hades, a place of torment, roughly equivalent to the Hebrew idea of *sheol*. The tables are well and truly turned in that Dives – the one who showed no mercy – is now the one who cries out for mercy. He tries a formal address – 'Father Abraham' – but St Luke has already warned us in the preaching of St John the Baptist 'do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.' (Lk 3:8). The reversal of fortunes should not surprise us: such was foretold in Our Lady's *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55). Dives does not respond well. First, he asks for Lazarus to be sent to cool him down – rather misunderstanding that there is no longer master-servant relationship possible with the one whose needs he had ignored when he was 'at his gate'. Second, he asks for urgent messages to be sent to his five brothers. The stern reply is that if the brothers do not heed Moses and the Prophets – the Scriptures – then they will not believe the word of someone who comes to them from the dead. This is very much the sting in the tail: Jesus is addressing the Pharisees and the clear implication is that they fall short in their righteousness and that, if they cannot spot the importance and significance of the ministry and preaching of Jesus, they are showing themselves unable to understand and grasp the significance of the whole Hebrew tradition.

Friday in the Second Week of Lent

Reading

Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46 (RSV)

The Parable of the Vineyard

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people: ³³ 'Hear another parable. There was a householder who planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to tenants, and went into another country. ³⁴ When the season of fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants, to get his fruit; ³⁵ and the tenants

took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other servants, more than the first; and they did the same to them. ³⁷ Afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' ³⁹ And they took him and cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰ When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' ⁴¹ They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.'

⁴² Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures:

**The very stone which the builders rejected
has become the head of the corner;
this was the Lord's doing,
and it is marvellous in our eyes?**

⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it. ...'

⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶ But when they tried to arrest him, they feared the multitudes, because they held him to be a prophet.

Reflection

THE PARABLE of the Vineyard, today's Gospel, is found in Mark's Gospel (12:1-12) where it is clearly about the harsh treatment given to a series of messengers, culminating in the killing of the Son and Heir. It is highly allegorical: the householder is God, the vineyard is Israel, the tenants are the leaders of Israel, the messengers are the prophets, and the Son and Heir is Jesus. Matthew makes small additions to the story, such as the notion of bearing fruit (first found at Mt 3:8) and the handing on of the vineyard to those whose work will yield fruit (Mt 21:43). Our Gospel reading omits verse 44 because arguably it should be after verse 42 and in any case is omitted from many manuscripts.

'And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but when it falls on any one, it will crush him'.

It is hard to hear this parable without the echoes of the Jewish-Christian argument in the Early Church, an argument which has led to tragic

consequences throughout the ages, into modern times. Equally it is impossible to avoid echoes of the simplistic supercessionist argument that God dumped the Jews, with their covenant, and replaced them with the Christians and our covenant. We need to be careful how we interpret the word *ethnos*, people. We are talking about a dispute not between Jews and Christians but between the Jewish leaders at that time and the followers of Jesus. It is possible that the whole passage needs to be seen as shaped by the generation after the first disciples, a generation that knew about the Greek version of the Old Testament (used in Mt 21:34, 36), the death of Jesus (Mt 21:38), and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (Mt 21:41). Finally, as we hop around the Bible in the readings during Lent, it is worth remembering that the Parable of the Vineyard occurs late in the Gospel. By this time the Passion and Death of Christ are casting a shadow and the tension between Jesus and those who oppose him is increasing.