

3rd Sunday of Lent - C

Note: If there are some of The Elect at the Mass, the readings given for Cycle A may be used. The alternate readings emphasize water: the water from the rock during the wandering in the desert, and the water from the well in Samaria. The Elect are longing for the waters of baptism.

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15

The story of the salvation of God's peoples continues during this Lenten season. Today we hear of Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush.

Moses (Hebrew: Moshe) was born into a Hebrew family who lived in Egypt. As the story goes, the Egyptians had issued an order to kill all male Jewish infants (commentators have suggested that this was to weaken the Jewish tribal bond by eliminating male heirs, thus forcing intermarriage and abolishing the priesthood). Moses escaped this fate by being cast adrift in a basket on the Nile (at the age of 3 months) and rescued by Pharaoh's daughter who immediately recognized him as a Hebrew (no doubt because Jews circumcised at 8 days and Egyptians at 13 years). Moses, as he was named by Pharaoh's daughter, was raised as her son. One day in 1486 B.C. when Moses was forty (Acts 7:23), he killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew and had to flee. He went to Midian [so named for Midian, a descendent of Abraham through Keturah (a wife of lower rank through whom the Hebrews established their connection with the Arabian tribes (Genesis 25:1-4; 1 Chronicles 1:32)]. Midian was located on the eastern shore of the Red Sea in the area of present Saudi Arabia and probably included the Sinai Peninsula.

He married a priest's daughter and settled down to be a shepherd, which brings us to the time of today's reading, about 40 years after his arrival in Midian.

3:1 [] Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. Leading the flock across the desert, he came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai.

2 There an angel of the LORD appeared to him in fire flaming out of a bush.

In Old Testament literature this expression may refer to God Himself or His angel. Here we are most probably hearing about God making Himself known to His chosen human instrument.

As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed. ³ So Moses decided, "I must go over to look at this remarkable sight, and see why the bush is not burned." ⁴ When the LORD saw him coming over to look at it more closely, God called out to him from the bush, "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am." ⁵ God said, "Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. ⁶ I

am the God of your father,” he continued, “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.”

God shows His fixed resolve to deliver the descendants of the patriarchs from their oppressors; and that Moses is to be His chosen instrument of deliverance.

Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Who can look at God and live? (Exodus 33:20).

⁷ But the LORD said, “I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering. ^{8a} Therefore I have come down to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians

God intervenes because He has seen and heard the cry of His suffering people (Exodus 2:23-25).

and lead them out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

The abundance of milk is one of the signs of prosperity and peace. The milk used in Old Testament times was sheep or goat’s milk kept in skin bottles. In regions where water was scarce or unsafe milk was used to quench the thirst. Honey is also a sign of abundance. It was essential in the diet of the nomadic tribes who did not cultivate cereals, but was not favored by settled peoples as a steady diet. Usually means date syrup as wild bee honey is not plentiful.

¹³ “But,” said Moses to God, “when I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ if they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what am I to tell them?”

Moses is objecting to being chosen and trying to show that the people won’t believe him; they won’t believe that he speaks for God.

¹⁴ God replied, “I am who am.”

The divine name manifests God to the worshiper; the old name, the God of your fathers (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), is not adequate.

Then he added, “This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you.”

The name in Hebrew is *YHWH* (Hebrew had no vowels). The name Jehovah has resulted from a misreading of the name in Hebrew. Wherever YHWH was encountered in Scriptures when reading, the title “Adonai” (Lord) was substituted and the insertion of the vowel sounds from Adonai into YHWH in the 19th century, resulted in Jehovah.

¹⁵ God spoke further to Moses, “Thus shall you say to the Israelites: The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.

“This is my name forever; this is my title for all generations.”

After revealing His Name, God elaborates the mission of His newly chosen instrument and sets aside his objection.

2nd Reading - 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12

Our epistle reading for today mentions the wilderness struggle of the Israelites, so it ties into the story of Moses and the people.

^{10:1} I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our ancestors were all under the cloud

As in Psalm 105:39.

and all passed through the sea, ² and all of them were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

“Paul says the Jews were under the cloud in order to point out that everything that happened to them is meant to be understood as a picture of the truth which has been revealed to us. Under the cloud they were protected from their enemies until they were delivered from death, analogous to baptism. For when they passed through the Red Sea they were delivered from the Egyptians who died in it (Exodus 14:28-29), and their death prefigured our baptism, which puts our adversaries to death as well.” [The Ambrosiaster (between A.D. 366-384), *Commentaries on Thirteen Pauline Epistles*]

³ All ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink,

Sustenance of supernatural origin; an allusion to the Eucharist.

for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them,

There is no Old Testament hint of movement of the rock, this is oral Jewish Tradition which is recorded in Scripture here for the first time.

and the rock was the Christ.

To heighten the Corinthians’ appreciation of the parallel situations, they should see the rock as equivalent to Christ now; the continuity of giving.

⁵ Yet God was not pleased with most of them, for they were struck down in the desert.

In verses 1 through 5 Saint Paul establishes a parallel between the situation of the Israelites in the desert and the Corinthians. He takes it for granted that the readers are familiar with the Exodus narrative, whose order he follows: the cloud (Exodus 13:21), the sea (Exodus 14:21), the manna (Exodus 16:4), the water (Exodus 17:6), and the rebellion (Exodus 32:6).

⁶ These things happened as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil things, as they did.

The chastisements inflicted on the unfaithful Israelites are a warning to Christians.

¹⁰ Do not grumble as some of them did, and suffered death by the destroyer.

On the basis of Exodus 12:23 (the Passover night), the rabbis believed that there was a special destroying angel.

“Those who were destroyed prefigured Judas, who betrayed Christ and was eliminated from the number of the apostles by the judgement of God.” [The Ambrosiaster (between A.D. 366-384), *Commentaries on Thirteen Pauline Epistles*]

¹¹ These things happened to them as an example, and they have been written down as a warning to us, upon whom the end of the ages has come.

The messianic period is the final period in salvation history (Hebrews 1:1-2). This is the period in which we currently live.

¹² Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall.

This is the whole point of this reading.

“Paul wants to remind us that we are not saved merely because we happen to have been the recipients of God’s free grace. We have to demonstrate that we are willing recipients of that free gift. The children of Israel received it, but they proved to be unworthy of it, and so they were not saved.” [Origen (ca. A.D. 240, *Commentary on First Corinthians* 4,45,2-5)]

Gospel - Luke 13:1-9

Our Gospel reading is a mid-Lenten call for repentance that provides a continuing balance to the Old Testament stories of covenant-making between God and His people. God called Moses and the Israelites. He demanded that the people of the covenant live a life of repentance and turn back to the Lord. The people of the covenant are expected to bear fruit. Our relationship with God cannot be taken for granted any more than a marriage relationship can. Husband and wife must constantly make decisions of love for each other. Priorities have to be set in which the marriage relationship comes first; otherwise the marriage falters, dries up, and often dies. The covenant must be renewed day after day after day with decisions for the covenant of marriage. This is the kind of constant decision making that is essential if we are to live in our covenant relationship with God.

^{13:1} At that time some people who were present there told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices.

This incident is recorded only here, and is otherwise unknown in secular histories. It fits, however, into the picture of Pilate that is known to us from the first century Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus:

“So he [Pilate] habited a great number of his soldiers in their habit, who carried daggers under their garments, and sent them to a place where they might surround them [the rebellious Jews]. He bade the Jews himself go away; but they boldly cast reproaches upon him so he gave the soldiers that signal which had been beforehand agreed on; the soldiers then laid upon them much greater blows than Pilate had commanded them, and equally punished those that were tumultuous, and those that were not, nor did they spare them in the least; and since the people were unarmed, and were caught by men prepared for what they were about, there were a great number of them slain by this means, and others of them ran away wounded; and thus an end was put to this sedition.” [*Antiquities of the Jews* §18:3,2(61-62)].

² He said to them in reply, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all other Galileans? ³ By no means!

Jesus doesn't condemn Pilate, he merely comments on the guilt of those so murdered; or lack thereof.

But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!

Repent and be ready for judgement.

⁴ Or those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem?

Probably one of the towers that guarded the pool of Siloam (located in the southeastern corner of Jerusalem).

⁵ By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!” ⁶ And he told them this parable: “There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard,

The fig tree is a symbol of Israel.

and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none, ⁷ he said to the gardener, ‘For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree but have found none. (So) cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?’

In Hebrew numerology, the number of completion; also the length of Jesus' public ministry.

⁸ He said to him in reply, ‘Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; ⁹ it may bear fruit in the future. If not you can cut it down.’”

God waits patiently for the fruit to appear; he wants him to be converted and live (Ezekiel 33:11).