

Fr. Brad Neely
3rd Sunday of Lent, Cycle C
Sts Peter & Paul / Nezperce: March 07, 2010
Ex 3: 1f; 1Cor 10: 1f; Lk 13: 1-9

I got an "email forward" last week.
It contained a collection of "Church Signs,"
one of which caught my eye:
"Try Jesus. If you don't like him
the devil will always take you back."

I suspect St. Paul would have liked
to forward this email to Corinth
if only he had had email.
In our selection from his letter to the Corinthians today,
I had never picked up
on his reference to our Jewish ancestors
as "baptized into Moses."
*"I do not want you to be unaware,
brothers and sisters,
that our ancestors were all under the cloud
and all passed through the sea,
and all of them were **baptized** into Moses
in the cloud and in the sea."*
After doing some investigation,
I found that Paul is using the word baptism here
as we normally use it---
as ---baptism into Christ---
as "being immersed."

We need to remember that the Corinthians,
are not starting their Christian life from ZERO.
Paul had already lived among them,
and they had been taught the tenets of Christianity,
including the Jewish history
leading up to Christianity.
Most of the members of the Church in Corinth (Greece),
were believed to be Gentiles.
Very purposely here,
Paul uses symbolism
tying Judaism and Christianity together
to make his ultimate point.

Here are some examples:

- * The Jews passing through the waters of the Red Sea
can be related to the *waters* of baptism.
The Jews pass through the waters to freedom.
Christians pass through baptismal waters,
also, for freedom.
- * So, in general, the reference in the Book of Exodus
of the liberation of the Jews from slavery in
Egypt

can be related to the liberation of Christians from
sin, made possible by Christ.

- * Paul's mention of "baptism into Moses"
can be related to baptism into Christ---
both referring to being *united*---
the Jews being united with Moses,
and later, Jews and Gentiles being united with
Christ.
Christ is "the new Moses." (though obviously
much greater than Moses).

- * The spiritual food Paul talks of
can be related to the manna
that the Israelites ate in the desert, *and this
manna*
can be related to the Eucharist.

A link had already been made by Paul
between the Passover meal
at the beginning of the Book of Exodus,
and Christ taking the Passover event
to its fullness measure at the Last Supper---
by the institution of his Body and Blood
given to us in the Eucharist.

So Paul is very eloquent.

He is eloquently linking the fullness of Christianity
to its roots in Judaism.

All well and good.

But why?

Because the Corinthians are falling into the same trap
as the Israelites in the desert.

Given their escape from Egypt---
given God leading them in the form of a cloud---
given that God gave them sustenance in the desert---
the Israelites *grumbled*, and *disobeyed*.

So Paul tells the Corinthians:

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

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

*Do not grumble as some of them did,
and suffer death by the destroyer."*

In other words, Paul is pleading:

"Kids, we've been through this once before
with our ancestors.

You guys have gone off the trolley.

There are consequences to this!

Not only that, but you might at least be appreciative of what God has done!
Get back on the track!”

Even though Paul is reminding his Gentile audience, about the hand of God upon the Israelites, we could also say that he is reminding us-also--today. Our Jewish ancestors are the same Jewish ancestors of the Corinthians in the 1st century!

But we've been given even more than our Jewish ancestors in the desert: Paul points out---**God went further**--- giving us His Son---Christ, the Messiah, to take us to the fullest measure of our relationship with God in this earthly life. The gift of God **to us**, has increased!
And Paul cautions:
don't be like the Israelites in the desert;
do not desire evil things;
do not grumble.

I suspect that none of us want to believe that we would desire evil things, but it is safe to say, I think, that there is grumbling. There **is** a lot of grumbling, in different forms, about God, and about Christ's church. [I don't experience much of this here].

Grumbling is not always direct. We do have public figures who pointedly and publicly disregard teachings of the Church, *or should I say*, the teachings of God *through* the Church. [There are many public organizations doing the same]. And grumbling can occur without the use of words.

There are people of faith who simply **ignore** teachings of the church, or should I say, the teachings of God *through* the church. So we ask the question, “do we trust that God had a good reason to reveal to us what was revealed, and subsequently passed down and taught by His Son's church?”

Taking the collection of Scriptures given us today, we have a passage from Exodus that tells us that the one true God has been revealed to our Israelite ancestors, and thus to **us**. This one true God described Himself as “I am who am.”

The Gospel writer Luke tells us about the consequences of an unrepentant lifestyle. And St. Paul tells us to carefully bear in mind **Who** we have united ourselves with; first Moses and then Christ. And we do well to hear with clarity what Paul says in the last verse, “*Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure, should take care not to fall.*” This is the opposite of telling the Corinthians, “just do whatever, and it will all work out.”

In this Lenten season, we have reminder after reminder of our obligations to the Covenant we share with God through Christ. It requires our attention, our appreciation, and our proper response.