

1st Sunday of Lent - C

Note: Today those who are participating in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (R.C.I.A.) and are preparing for participation in the sacraments of the Church for the first time at the Easter Vigil Mass this year have a ceremony called the Rite of Election. Between now and Easter they are called The Elect.

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.

Introduction

Lent originated in the early Church as a season for the preparation of those desiring baptism. From early times the account of the history of salvation played an important part in the preparation for baptism. Through our baptism we embraced the new and eternal covenant with God brought into being by Christ's death and resurrection. Ours is not the only covenant God made with man. The covenants of the Old Testament (Old Covenant) are a great help in understanding what God has done for us in His New Covenant. Consequently, in her preparation for Easter, the Church remembers the covenants of the Old Testament to remind us of the stages of God's plan for our redemption and also to instruct those to be baptized.

Lent has always been a teaching season, a time to reflect on the mighty acts of God in the history of the world, on the covenant between God and His children, and on the role of our older brother Jesus in the story of salvation. Lent might be called a "primer course in the Christian faith."

The epistle readings for Lent, unlike those of many other times of the year, do form a unity with the other two readings as we go through an annual "telling of the covenant story."

1st Reading - Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Our Old Testament reading recalls the ancient creed of Israel. When we hear this creed, notice that it is a recalling of how God has acted for His people. Our belief comes from our story, our history – which is the history of the Jewish people of the Old Testament as well as the Christians of the New. We believe as Christians because it is through recalling our history we become sensitive to how God has acted and is now acting in our lives and in the lives of all His children. In other words, our belief in God comes from recalling the story of God's saving acts. This belief leads to the statement in our creed "I believe." From such a statement comes in turn the willingness to make our covenant with this God who is so active in our history. "I will be your instrument of history-making in your world. I will judge my actions by my belief that you are a just and loving God who calls all creation into wholeness and oneness with you." "I will do whatever you tell me." "You are my God (my Father) and I am one of your people (your child).

[Moses spoke to the people, saying:]⁴ “The priest shall then receive the basket from you and shall set it in front of the altar of the LORD, your God.⁵ Then you shall declare before the LORD, your God, ‘My father was a wandering Aramean who went down to Egypt with a small household and lived there as an alien.

Aram was a son of Shem, Noah’s firstborn son. The word “Aram” means high, or highlands, and as the name of a country denotes that elevated region extending from the northeast of Palestine to the Euphrates. It corresponded generally with the Syria and Mesopotamia of the Greeks and Romans. Jacob (Israel) is a key figure in the early history of the people of Israel and the reference to him here not by name, but as “a wandering Aramean” underlines the contrast between the miserable circumstances of Israel earlier and settlement in the promised land. Jacobs’ descendents could be called Arameans because his wives (Leah and Rachael) were Arameans (Genesis 29-30).

But there he became a nation great, strong and numerous.⁶ When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us, imposing hard labor upon us,

Notice the change from “he” to “us.” This change in person is significant. The Hebrews have a common historical heritage and tradition: My father was Israel – therefore I am Israel.

⁷ we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and he heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil and our oppression.

Divine action in response to prayer.

⁸ He brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying power, with signs and wonders.⁹ and bringing us into this country, he gave us the land flowing with milk and honey.

This is Passover terminology. Recall that for this to happen, the sacrifice had to be made, the blood sprinkled, the meat roasted and eaten, and the remainder burned. The feast of Passover (unleavened bread) was to be celebrated annually (Exodus 12:42-51).

¹⁰ Therefore, I have now brought you the first fruits of the products of the soil which you, O LORD, have given me.’

This is a reference to the Feast of Pentecost (first fruits of the grain harvest, fifty days after Passover) (see Exodus 13:1-13).

And having set them before the LORD, your God, you shall bow down in his presence.”

Verse 11, which immediately follows today’s reading says **“Then you and your family, together with the Levite and the aliens who live among you, shall make merry over all these good things which the LORD, your God, has given you.”**

A family celebration will take place in which all will joyfully participate in the liturgy of covenant renewal. Likewise, we should joyfully participate in our renewal of the covenant; the Eucharistic celebration with its associated historical stories and creed: actions we take in the Lord's name. Our celebration of the Eucharist has little meaning without the background of history, creed, covenant, and action. That is why we all must see the Eucharist in its proper context. It can not be an isolated event that is stuck into one's weekly schedule. Rather, it is a binding together in a family meal of our common history and creed as we declare "You are my God and we are your people."

2nd Reading - Romans 10:8-13

Just as in our first reading we heard the ancient creed of Israel, in this second reading we hear the confession of faith of the believers of Christ.

⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"

Quoted from Deuteronomy 30:14.

(that is, the word of faith that we preach), ⁹ for, if you confess with your mouth

One must verbalize the basic Christian confession of faith and mean it.

that Jesus is Lord

The Creedal (if not baptismal) formula of the early Palestinian Church (see also 1 Corinthians 12:3; Philippians 2:11).

and believe in your heart

An inward faith is required; one that will guide the whole person. Note that a verbal assent to that faith is also required.

that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

The activity of the Father in Christ's resurrection. In the opening line of our reading was a quotation from Deuteronomy "the word is near you" – Jesus is the word; this is how the Jews will escape presumption – sacrifices which will not lead to salvation.

¹⁰ For one believes with the heart and so is justified,

Righteous – made right with God; innocent of any charges, made (not declared, but actually made) pure.

and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

The whole process, from its beginning in faith, through the whole Christian life of the works of love on earth, to its completion in heaven. Protestants look at being saved as the initial step – like getting into Noah’s ark of salvation – not the whole journey. Faith, which leads to righteousness, for the Catholic is one of the three theological virtues (faith, hope, love), faith being intellectual belief. To Luther, faith meant accepting Christ with your whole heart and soul. Catholics use salvation in a bigger sense and faith in a smaller sense than do Protestants. We must be careful to define our terminology when we deal with others so as not to confuse them.

¹¹ For the scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.”

Quoted from Isaiah 28:16.

¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek;

All have the opportunity to share alike in the new uprightness through a common faith.

the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him.

Jesus, the risen Lord of Jew and Greek (Romans 9:5; Philippians 2:9-11). In the Old Testament those who “call upon the name of the Lord” denoted sincere and pious Israelites; in the New Testament it is transferred to Christians.

¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Quoted from Joel 2:32.

Gospel - Luke 4:1-13

So far, we have heard the ancient creed of Israel, and the creed of the early Palestinian Christian Church, now we hear of Jesus’ temptation. The three temptations of Jesus are the same three temptations which were Israel’s downfall during their desert experience: they complained about the manna, they worshiped the golden calf, and they tested God. In each case, Jesus shows what they should have done.

^{4:1} Filled with the holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan

This occurs immediately after Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist where the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove.

and was led by the Spirit

Does not lead Him into temptation, but is the sustaining power with Him during temptation.

into the desert

This is perhaps a reference to the Judean wilderness – the exact location is unknown. In Luke 8:29 and 11:24 the desert is a place of demons.

² for forty days,

Forty is the number of change, transition. Forty days of rain in the flood, 40 years from Egypt to the promised land, 40 days from private life to public ministry, 40 days from resurrection to ascension.

to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days,

Moses fasted for 40 days on Mount Sinai and Jesus does likewise.

and when they were over he was hungry. ³ The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God,

Both here and in verse 9 Jesus is called “son of God” by Satan: a reference to His baptism (Luke 3:22) and Adam, son of God (Luke 3:38).

command this stone to become bread.” ⁴ Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

Deuteronomy 6:13.

⁵ Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant.

No mountain is high enough to see all kingdoms in the world, this must have been a vision.

⁶ The devil said to him, “I shall give to you all this power and their glory; for it has been handed over to me,

John’s idea also is that the world is under the power of the Devil (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Luke 22:53; Acts 26:18).

and I may give it to whomever I wish. ⁷ All this will be yours, if you worship me.” ⁸ Jesus said to him in reply, “It is written: ‘You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.’”

Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:20; Exodus 23:24.

⁹ Then he led him to Jerusalem,

It is in Jerusalem that Jesus completes His mission, His exodus. In Jerusalem Satan seizes Judas

(Luke 23:3); in Jerusalem the powers of darkness are mightily at work (Luke 22:53). Jesus' entire ministry is presented by Luke as a journey leading to Jerusalem – our journey is to the heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2).

made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,¹⁰ for it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’

Satan quotes Psalm 91:11.

¹¹ and: ‘With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’”

Satan quotes Psalm 91:12.

¹² Jesus said to him in reply, “It also says, ‘You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.’”

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16.

¹³ When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

During His ministry Jesus will encounter many temptations and the powers of evil who know who He is (Luke 4:41; 8:29) and He will vanquish them. Jesus will overcome hostility to His mission by obedient faith and will liberate mankind held captive by the devil (Acts 10:38).

Closing Comment:

Satan knows Holy Scripture better than any Christian and uses selective quotation to try and influence the outcome. Holy Scripture is not a collection of individual verses to be selected from in order to make a point. Holy Scripture is the story of the making of God's family and must always be used in the context intended by the original human author and the Holy Spirit. In order to establish the context, sometimes reading the five verses before and after the verse selected is not sufficient. Notice that Jesus, in this reading, refers to different books than those quoted by Satan in order to establish the context of Satan's quotation. Holy Scripture never contradicts itself and individual verses should be used very carefully.