

Homily For the 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time- Year C

St. Peter's Sunday Masses - July 7, 2019

Isaiah 66: 10-14 "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you."

Psalms 66: 1-7,16-20 "Come and hear, all who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me."

Galatians 6: 14-18 "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Luke 10:1-12,17-20 "Don't rejoice that spirits submit to you, but that your names are written in heaven."

Because I Said I Would

Introduction: The God Who Keeps His Promises

A woman we know got cancer when her children were young. Her prayer was that God would let her be there until her they were grown. They are and she is still alive and healthy. It doesn't always work out that way but, when we tune ourselves to the ways of God, we will see how he is the God who keeps his promises.

God made three promises to Abraham. Old Abe couldn't see how things were going to happen, but it says that he believed God anyway. The thing about God is that, just when it looks like he has abandoned his promises, we find out that it was really us who moved away from God. That's the history of God's people. That's what we inherit. Today, in three readings, we get snapshots of how it was going as those three promises unfolded.

The Promise of a Land

One of the three promises was a homeland. That was the promise of a land where they would be prosperous and free and where God himself would be in their midst. That had been fulfilled when they crossed the Jordan River and entered that promised land. But, after many years and many times falling away from the worship of the God of promises, they lost that land. They really thought they had lost God with the land.

Many people know what it's like to lose their home. It could be a flood or a fire or war or financial ruin. One of the most heartbreaking images is a family looking at the ruin of their homes. It's not just losing their shelter and their most valuable possession. It's the fact that everything that connects them with their memories, their history, their families, is taken away. It's like losing a huge piece of themselves. I remember the story of a woman who cried when she rented a house after losing hers in the flood in High River.

For the Israelites taken into bondage in Babylon, it was all of that and more. God's own city, Jerusalem, contained the glorious temple Solomon had built to house the Ark of God's Presence, the Ark of the Covenant. The covenant was God's promise to always be with his people. Jerusalem was destroyed. The glorious temple that Solomon built was torn down and the Ark lost.

When they went back and rebuilt the temple it was a pathetic shadow of its former self and the city had lost most of its luster. They cried when they looked at it to think about what they had lost.

But Isaiah was the prophet who was now saying that they had not lost God. In fact, they would be beginning a new relationship with him, as babies. Today's first reading seems to go overboard with images of how a mother nurtures her child. She nurses it. She caresses it and holds her baby to herself. She plays with her child on her knee. As the infant experiences joy in its mother's loving embrace, so would the people, now reborn in a way, experience new life with God. This was to be the new ground of their being, the new and higher way of looking at the promise of a land.

The Promise of a Nation

Land was actually the second promise. But the first promise was that Abraham would become a great nation, a people who would be numerous and would be God's holy people and he would be their God. But how would you know if you were part of God's people? Well, property and slaves in the ancient world were branded or tattooed with a mark of ownership. For a person, that meant you were literally owned. You were a slave. That's the language people understood.

So God used a sign that people knew about in those days. It wasn't unheard of for peoples to practice circumcision. But it became the physical sign for a man and his family that they were members of God's people.

Paul uses the language of being a slave, owned by Christ. The marks of that ownership were the scars he got from being beaten and whipped. He says, "I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body." If you want to boast about something, he says, boast about that.

If we didn't notice it before, our God gives great recognition to our physical bodies. Whether it is a mother nurturing her child or Jesus being tortured and crucified, it is in our physical state that love is expressed. So, love is expressed **both** in tenderness **and** in self sacrifice. I have a friend who donated one of his kidneys to a sick cousin. He bears the scars in his body of self giving love. He gave what was his to give without holding back.

Imitating Christ, Christianity conquered the entire Roman Empire because of love and a willingness to suffer to be known as Christians. Even as the Empire fell apart, Christians did the work of taking care of those in need. We leave most of that to government programs now, but it's the primary requirement of being a Christian and the sign of being part of that great nation of people.

The Promise of Blessing to the Nations

The third promise was never understood until it was fulfilled. It was easy to imagine receiving land and being part of a great nation. We can relate to that. We pursue all of the things that are going to benefit ourselves and our families. But how about God's plan to bring salvation to all people?

I have a brother who has basically dedicated the rest of his life to making sure his two children and four grandchildren are doing ok. I love this about him because it means he has understood something so important about love. But God's plan is even bigger than that. It's a plan for the eternal happiness of every person and nation. Those Egyptians who had enslaved the Israelites for 400 years? Those are my children too, he says. And the Babylonians who conquered them? I need to

reach them also. And the cruel Romans? Show them what it means to love like God does because I intend to save them too.

Today's Gospel passage shows Jesus sending out 70 disciples, in pairs, to tell people about the coming of the kingdom of God. He gave them his own authority over natural things like illness and over spiritual things like demons. They were thrilled with this but Jesus did not congratulate them for having done their work well. Instead, he recommended that they adjust their priorities to desiring that their names written in heaven in heaven.

Jesus slips into the conversation this dramatic fact. He was there when Satan and his followers challenged God as the source of all wisdom and love and life: "I saw Satan fall like a flash of lightning." It's one of the many times Jesus gives us a clue about his full identity. He was there when Satan rejected God's plan to bless the whole world and so fell from heaven. And now he was establishing the pattern for how all of God's people would enter that kingdom.

Call To Action/ The Promises Today

The big question, the one that can make sense of everything we learn from scripture and attending mass is: What do those promises, made to Abraham so long ago, mean for us today? Is God still fulfilling those promises in our lives and our times?

What about land? In our Baptism, we have a new ground to stand on. We are truly born anew. Jesus told them you don't need the temple. I am the new temple from which the grace of God flows like a river and is given like a mother's love. Through Baptism, we are born into a new life and become participators in the divine life in God's own bosom as his sons and daughters.

What about a great nation? Our unity is seen in the sign that we wear in our souls. We bear the wounds of Christ. What are those wounds? They are the wounds of love. We offer new life to others who have suffered loss. We can be instruments of God's promise to be present with us always. Jesus broke the bread and poured out the wine, saying "This is my body and blood which will be given for you.

Through the Eucharist we share in the common meal of God's family. In it we receive the nourishment which is Jesus Christ, God's own life given for us. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are made sharers of the graces of the kingdom in the sacramental life of the Church.

What about blessing to the nations? The sign of that blessing is the peace of Christ? The peace of Christ in me is uniting itself to the Christ in you. When we exchange the sign of peace, it is not a time for Catholic recess. It is part of the sacred movement of the mass. Then God comes to us under the appearance of bread and wine but what is really Jesus, the kingdom for which God's people have always longed. It is the true peace of God. It is the nourishment through God's own life. True peace from the one who IS peace, Jesus Christ.

The Psalmist says to go and tell what God has done for you. Go and tell of God's promises fulfilled in your life. Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth. How awesome are your works.