

Homily For Tuesday of the 25th Week of Ordinary Time- Year 1

St Peter's 8:30 AM/7:00 PM Masses - September 24, 2019

Ezra 4:4-20 "They killed the Passover lamb for the returned exiles, for the priests, and for themselves."

Psalm 122 "Let us go rejoicing the house of the Lord."

Luke 8:19-21 "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

Hear God's Word and Do It

Luke

This incident from Jesus' ministry has come up in weekday and Sunday readings in the recent months. It bears repeating that this is not about Jesus undermining or minimizing Mary's ongoing importance. In fact, we see it as Jesus lifting up her key role in the history of salvation. She IS the one who most hears the word of God and does what it asks. That is why we have particular reverence for her 'fiat', her profound statement of faith, "Let it be done to me according to **your word**." There is nothing about Jesus' mother that would suggest that her status as "favoured one" has been given to some unnamed people Jesus refers to in this passage. The point is that she is exactly the model for those who would hear God's word and do it.

The other thing we can do with this passage is to look deeper at how it connects us to the full sweep of salvation history. As Catholics, we never look at any passage in isolation. All of Sacred Scripture must be seen in light of its fullness. For example, we consider others who hear the word of God and do it. We can see the steady progression of our heroes in the faith, from the great Old Testament men and women, right up to today's recognition of Blessed EmilieTravernier-Gamelin, a Canadian who poured out her life, in imitation of Jesus, for the poor, those most beloved of God.

Ezra

Yesterday and today we hear of two pagan kings who willingly participate in God's plan of salvation for his people. Yesterday's passage from Ezra says that it was the

Lord himself who stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus to send the Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the city walls. His successor, Darius, makes a decree that the people of the land around Jerusalem must stop harassing the process. He further opens up the coffers of the Persian empire for them to complete the work. This is quite remarkable. And what does he say at the end of the decree? "Let it be done with all diligence."

We know that all authority belongs to God. This is what Jesus told Pilate at his trial. "You would have no authority over me if it had not been given to you from above." Whether earthly powers use their authority to cooperate with God or to stand in his way, the God of the universe furthers his great plan of salvation.

Six hundred years before Jesus, the people of God had stopped hearing the word of God, and doing what it required. They had lost God's favour because they were not doing the works of justice. They were abusing the poor and needy. They had become self centred and unforgiving. This should be a lesson for us in a society which is tending, or 'trending' as they say on Twitter, towards self centredness.

The result was they lost God's favour and their freedom at the hands of the Babylonian empire. But God used two pagan kings from that same empire to restore them. Let us not miss the effect of this cooperation.

The people of Israel celebrated the rededication of the temple "with joy." This is the same temple that Jesus would use to illustrate that he has become the new dwelling place of God's presence. He is the new temple which we should celebrate with joy.

Darius decreed that the cost would be "paid in full", pointing the way forward to Jesus, who would pay the full cost for our sin, as a reparation for the rebellion of our human nature against God.

The Israelites restored the priesthood to offer the animal sacrifices prescribed by the law, paving the way for the sacrifice of our ultimate High Priest, Jesus, who pointed out: "I have not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it." Those priests purified themselves according to that same law, a purification that was limited.

But Jesus was already the holy one of God, who had no need of further purification.

"Then they celebrated the Passover" ... the great event of God's action to free them from slavery. How many times are we reminded of the slavery to pride and lust and greed, these things that God, in his great mercy, gave his Son to free us.

Call to Action

I think we can do no better today than to dwell on the closing words of today's first reading. "So they killed the Passover lamb" ... and we meditate on the pure and spotless Lamb of God. "So they killed the Passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for the priests, and for themselves." And we meditate on the greatest event of all in salvation history, when the Lord of life gave himself up for us in perfect obedience, who was sacrificed for the very people in this holy place here today, and wherever the sacrifice of the mass is being offered. We who were exiles because of our sin and the sin of humanity, are now restored. And to live the fullness of the life that has been restored, today, once again, we are invited to hear the word of God, and do it.