

Homily for May 11, 2017

Today and tomorrow we will be listening to the first sermon St. Paul gives, which is the longest recorded sermon of St Paul's in Acts. What Paul does in this sermon is summarize the story of Salvation History. Another way to speak of this kind of history is to call it sacred history. It is the telling of God's relationship with us through the setting up of covenants.

Now when we think of covenants today, we see in marriage a clear understanding of what is involved in a covenant. Whereas a contract involves the exchange of goods, a covenant involves an exchange of persons. Unlike most contracts, covenants are not merely civil but sacred bonds, in which an oath is employed to establish the relationship. People often sign marriage contracts but such agreements are often entered into in case the marriage doesn't work out and the contract defines who will get what at the marriage's dissolution. A marriage covenant is very different. For in this, words are spoken, the vows, whereby the man and woman state that they will now give themselves to each other in life long, monogamous union.

With this understanding of covenant let's now turn to the reading in Acts. The key phrase in this passage is:

The God of this people Israel chose our ancestors

The covenants with God that Paul will describe in this part of the sermon are initiated by God. Jesus in the Gospels states the same thing when he says: "You did not choose me, but I chose you". This is the first thing to understand about God's covenant relationship. We discover that we are a chosen people and this means that we are a people who are to live in deepening relationship with the Lord. As Paul tells the story of God choosing Israel, everything is stated in summary form. He refers to the Israelite's time in Egypt, the deliverance under Moses, the establishing of the people in the Land of Canaan, the sending of the Judges, establishing Saul as King, and then we get to David. When we get to David, Paul now does more than just give a summary. St. Luke records:

I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my heart, who will carry out all my wishes.

Now what is it about David that makes him a Man after God's own heart? It was his desire through all of his life to remain in relationship with the God who had chosen him. It is helpful to remember that there isn't anyone in the Old Testament of whom we know more than David. His exterior life is chronicled in detail twice, in 1 and 2nd Samuel and in the Book of Chronicles. Then in so many of the psalms we are given deep insight into David's interior life. The thing that marks David apart for many in the Old Testament is that he truly entered into a covenantal relationship with the Lord. There were many ups and downs through the 40 plus years that we read detailing David's life. But like in a marriage that is true to the covenant promises through all of the ups and downs of married life, David never turned his back on God, he never walked out of the relationship. This covenant relationship between God and David is celebrated in today's psalm. This is a psalm written after David's death that celebrates the relationship David

had with the Lord. It is one of the longer psalms; here we have three excerpts. In them there is repeated reference to God's steadfast love and faithfulness, God's anointing of David as King and then these words:

***My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him;
and in my name his name shall be exalted.***

***26 He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father,
my God, and the Rock of my salvation!'***

These were words that David could only fully know after a lifetime of covenantal relationship with the Lord.

May we be inspired by David's life, a man after God's own heart. A heart that often sinned against God but a heart that was always desirous to return to God.

David was someone who would have grasped the words of today's Collect:

***O God, who restore human nature to yet greater dignity than at its beginnings, look upon the
amazing mystery of your loving kindness.***

Those who know the Lord's covenant love discover their true dignity because they live in the depth of the Lord's loving kindness.

May we pray, Lord makes us to be men and women after your own heart so that we may live daily in deepening relationship with you.