

Homily for Wednesday of the 8th Week of Ordinary Time
 1 Peter 1:18–25
 Psalm 147:12–15, 19–20
 Mark 10:32–45

In his first letter Peter makes it very clear that as Christians we are living in this world as aliens and exiles. He begins his letter with this address: “To the exiles”. Then in 1:17 he writes “live in reverent fear during the time of your exile”. Then in 2:11 he states it again: “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles”.

Now this word alien means “one who dwells beside”. It is the Greek word *paroikos*. The root word is “oikos” which in English is “house”. The prefix: “para” means “beside”. Therefore *paroikos* means “beside the house” *Paroikos* is a neighbor, and this is the original meaning of the word. But it came to mean “sojourner,” or “alien,” one who is not dwelling in one’s own house, but who lives among others in a foreign land. Why is this instructive? Our English word “parish” derives from *paroikos*. The local church—our parish—is meant to be the gathering of Christian “sojourners” and “aliens” who are far from their true home. And what is our true home? It is where God dwells; it is eternal life with God and his people.

Today’s readings teaches us the implications of what it means to be aliens all related to the word “ransom”

We have been ransomed from
 We have been ransomed by
 We have been ransomed for.

Three prepositions, “from”, “by” and “for” will help us better understand how we are to conduct ourselves in this present time of exile as aliens and so live intentionally as the Parish of St. Peter’s.

In verse 18 Peter says:

18 You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors.

“Ransom,” or “redemption,” is drawn from the marketplace, where goods or slaves were “bought back” for a monetary price. They were ransomed. In the classical world, the way of life handed down by one’s ancestors was highly prized and considered much more valuable than novel teachings or practices. Peter reverses this way of thinking. Peter calls these ways futile because they are devoid of Christ Jesus and the wisdom of the Gospel. The ways of the world are futile when compared with Christ and his wisdom.

Peter then goes on to say who we are ransomed by:

not with perishable things like silver or gold,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.²⁰ He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake.

Here Peter moves from a market place term, “ransom” to a Temple term relating to sacrifice. They were ransomed not with silver and gold – which are perishable – but with the imperishable blood of Jesus. Then Peter says something very important that his readers would have understood. Novelties and newfangled teachings in the ancient world were generally considered inferior to those that had a long pedigree. There was a clear-cut bias in favor of wisdom that had proved itself over many generations. Though Peter is rejecting the “futile” conduct handed down by the ancestors (v. 18), he wants to counteract the view that he is peddling a new teaching from a latecomer on the scene. Peter is saying that Jesus predates even the beginning of the world—and there is a tacit claim here to the preexistence of the Son. Known and chosen by the Father even before the world began, Christ represents the truly ancient plan of God for the ransom of the world so Peter says Jesus was destined to be the sacrifice by which we are ransomed before the foundation of the world.

If we have been ransomed from futile ways, ransomed by the blood of Jesus what have we been ransomed for? He tells us in verse 22:

Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.

Peter’s exhortation to “love one another deeply from the heart” challenges us in two ways. First, it pushes against our entrenched individualism and our desire to pick and choose our relationships. For Peter, to become a Christian is to inherit a set of brothers and sisters that we do not choose. God has chosen them, and we must live with them and love them. We need a conversion to see that to become a Christian is to enter a new family, the household of God. Second, Peter’s call to love with sincerity and intensity—with a love that stays firm over time—challenges us to do something extremely difficult. Stable love is not the strong suit of our present culture. All of us know how hard it is to keep on loving through difficulties. But right here is the good news. Although we cannot do this on our own—on our own we are like the grass and the flowers that spring up only to fade quickly—we can do it because we have a new birth through God’s living and abiding Word, active within us. Through that Word we now have the power to love with a love that endures.

Such a community, that knows what we have been ransomed from, whom we have been ransomed by and what we have been ransomed for will live as purposeful parish. A paroikos of aliens for whom the prepositions “from”, “by” and “for” help us to locate our present address as we await our permanent home.