

TESTING...TESTING

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

CYCLE B

Exodus 20:1-17
I Corinthians 1:22-25
John 2:13-25

GATHERING

(A crucifix and a lit candle are arranged in the gathering place.)

The liturgy of the past two weeks of Lent introduce images of testing: that of the Spirit sending Jesus into the desert to be tested by Satan, that of Abraham being tested by God. This week's liturgy summons us to look into the human heart with Jesus and to allow our own covenant fidelity to be tested.

The session begins with some sharing of how people have been entering into the observance of Lent and how this is manifested in their daily lives.

OPENING PRAYER

(Members join in singing, "You Are Near". The song may be found on the Internet.)

(After a pause following the song, the leader invites someone to pray the following in the name of the community.)

Member: Lord, we know you are near. Stir up your presence in our midst. You know the hearts of us all. We come together to hear you speak through each of our hearts. Help us to enter more deeply into the mystery of your dying and rising. By your Spirit we pray.

All: Amen.

Focus Question

Socrates said, "An unexamined life is not worth living." How *examined* a life do you live?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

Commentary

Somebody once said that the line between being pagan and being Christian runs through the center of each believer's heart. Might it not be this insight which underlies the narrator's portrayal of Jesus' behavior at the close of this week's gospel? Many were believing in his name, we are told, because they could see the signs he was performing. But "Jesus would not trust himself to them....He was well aware of what was in the human heart."

One would expect Jesus to be portrayed as wary of those who were against him. But in this story it is rather those who believe in his name from whom he withholds his trust. A stunning image, is it not? One which stops the believer of any age in his/her tracks.

What is it in this human heart of ours about which Jesus need be wary? Fidelity costs. And oh, how we can vacillate! How fickle we can be!

Conversion is the work of a lifetime. And Lent is a special time for testing conversion, not only that of the catechumens, but that of us all. Lent presents us anew with the invitation to enter yet more deeply into the mystery of dying and rising. It is a mystery which seeks to be realized not only deep within each of our hearts but also in the world about us.

Entering into the mystery of Jesus' dying and rising calls us to embrace transformation of the world within and without.

The God who would save us portrays for us a consistent ethic of life in the ten commandments. They stand as a bulwark against a culture of chaos and death. They are a mystery of both *Yes* and *No*. They are worded negatively, but the commandments are above all an affirmation of life. They assert the dignity of the human person, and promote a bedrock of justice to support relationships.

The commandments stand as a great *No* to forces that would enslave us. But from time immemorial to the present day the human heart struggles to choose life and true freedom. Idolatry, the dishonor of God's name, neglect of the sabbath, abuse of father and mother, murder, adultery, theft, coveting: they are as much a part of our lives and our culture today as in the time of Moses. The line between pagan and Christian still runs through the center of each believer's heart.

Let us look deeply into our hearts and discern. Let us act in behalf of the transformation of our own lives and that of our world. Let us say *Yes* and choose life in God, in Christ anew!

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

(The community pauses in silence for several minutes to ponder the scriptures and the questions which follow.)

1. How well are you entering into the Lenten observance? What helps? What hinders?
2. What are the movements in your heart from which Jesus would withhold his trust?
3. How are the communities (eg. family, parish, small community) of which you are a part being presently challenged to choose life over death?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

Leader: In the light of our sharing of life and faith over the scripture for this week's liturgy, what does God ask of you, personally; what does God ask of us as a community? *(After an extended pause the leader invites responses from the community.)*

Suggestion:

1. Schedule two twenty minute periods of silence during this week to listen to your heart and to the Lord speaking to you from your heart.
2. Make sure the whole family will be together for a common meal some time this week. If only adults are gathered, quote the statement: The line between being pagan and being Christian runs through the center of each believer's heart. Invite those gathered to comment on that point of view. If children are present, invite them to comment on the meaning of one of the ten commandments.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader invites the community to pause in silence for a few moments to reflect on the sharing of this session. After a minute or two, the leader further invites the members to acknowledge in their hearts those places where they are called anew to choose life over death.)

Leader: Let us pray for the needs of our world and our church, for the needs of our family and for the needs of our own hearts. *(Time is allowed for intercessory prayer. The community responds to the petitions: Lord, we know you are near. When the petitions are complete the prayer continue as follows.)*

- Leader: Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.
- All: Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.
- Leader: The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul;
The decree of the Lord is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple.
- All: Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.
- Leader: The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
The command of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eye.
- All: Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.
- Leader: The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever;
The ordinances of the Lord are true, all of them just.
- All: Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.
- Leader: They are more precious than gold, than a heap of purest gold;
Sweeter also than syrup or honey from the comb.
- All: Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.

(The session concludes with a sign of peace.)