

3rd Sunday Lent "A"

March 14-15, 2020

*Our Testing Place*

Readings: Exodus 17:3-7; Romans 5:1-2,5-8; John 4:5-42

Murmuring, grumbling, complaining... "Why did you ever make us leave Egypt?" Moses was aware of the grumbling; he could hear the groanings more and more loudly every passing day. Eventually, it got to be too much. The people in one respect should have known all about the difficulties of desert journeys. The scarcity of wells or oases is obviously one of them. Today, we enjoy the freeway oases, complete with fast food, video games; you never even have to leave the interstate.

The people who had trusted him so much were beginning to turn on him, and that awful feeling in the pit of his stomach must have been churning. He felt like he was losing control. What then, did he do? **Moses cried out to the Lord.** He did the only thing he knew at such a time.

Many people today can relate—they are crying out, not perhaps with a spirit of complaining, but certainly motivated by confusion or even fear. While not in uncharted waters, a global pandemic is unquestionably rare and throws us off our game, so to speak.

This Scripture is put before us 3000 years later, not so that we might criticize the Israelites, but rather so that we might look into our own consciences to determine just how solid our trust is in God, and how sincere is our gratitude to Him is for past favors. In this challenging time for our world, our nation, people may very well call us to doubt the presence of God in our lives—where is He? No one would deny these.

God created us for a purpose, and we need to see our life as a testing ground, which includes many trials and tests. The words Massah and Meribah mean "testing-place," and there are plenty of opportunities. St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that we should never pray that God take away all temptation, for in that we would lose a chance to imitate Christ, who himself was tempted. But he did not give in to temptation or despair.

To reach the end that God has in store for us, the trials and tests of life are as important, and as useful, as the moments of quiet, peace and calm, and the triumphs. In some cases, they may even be more useful. Jesus Christ is the life-giving water—he, and he alone will provide the life-giving nourishment we need. Christ did not leave us orphaned.

My encouragement is to treat this time as you might a retreat. We will all be staying closer to home, more isolated from one another. So, use the time effectively for spiritual reading, prayer and reflection. Let there be some spiritual good that will come from this. Do not watch the news 24/7. Use the time for prayer instead. You will be better off for it.

On Saturday evening, rather than go out for dinner with priests as I often do, I stayed home and cracked open Augustine's City of God. At nearly 900 pages of very small print, I have a long way to go, but at least I started!

The Church leads us to the life-giving water of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist we are celebrating is the spiritual food that strengthens us for the journey. We are privileged to receive it. Next time we feel like grumbling, let us not forget that gift. In this time of need, I share this prayer offered by Archbishop Gomez, President of the USCCB:

Holy Virgin of Guadalupe,  
Queen of the Angels and Mother of the Americas.  
We fly to you today as your beloved children.  
We ask you to intercede for us with your Son,  
as you did at the wedding in Cana.  
Pray for us, loving Mother,  
and gain for our nation and world,  
and for all our families and loved ones,  
the protection of your holy angels,  
that we may be spared the worst of this illness.  
For those already afflicted,  
we ask you to obtain the grace of healing and deliverance. (Con't)

Hear the cries of those who are vulnerable and fearful,  
wipe away their tears and help them to trust.  
In this time of trial and testing,  
teach all of us in the Church to love one another and to be patient and kind.  
Help us to bring the peace of Jesus to our land and to our hearts.  
We come to you with confidence,  
knowing that you truly are our compassionate mother,  
health of the sick and cause of our joy.  
Shelter us under the mantle of your protection,  
keep us in the embrace of your arms,  
help us always to know the love of your Son, Jesus. Amen.