

Reflection for Lent 2012

Journeying with Jesus through Lent and looking particularly at the Sunday readings, we see a focus on the different stages of the journey of Jesus. Sundays one and two of Lent focus on the personal journey of Jesus, where He is seen going from desert experience [first Sunday] to mountain experience [second Sunday]. The gospel for the first Sunday has Mark saying: 'The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan.' [Mk 1:12] Here Jesus is seen alone, grappling with the meaning of His own existence. Though he is tempted to the point of exhaustion, Jesus remains firm in his conviction: 'You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone'. [Matt 4:10] Though the devil left him then, he would 'return at the appointed time'. [Lk 4:13] Already the scene is set for the struggle between good and evil.

On the second Sunday we read: 'Jesus took with him Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain'. [Mark 9:2] Note the language 'Jesus led' and note the fact that he was in the company of trusted companions in this mountain experience. Not only are Peter, James and John given a glimpse of His glory on the mountain, Jesus himself is affirmed by the Father: 'This is my Son, the Beloved, Listen to Him'. [Mk 9:6]

Moving into the next stage of the journey of Jesus (or the journey of Lent) Sundays 3 and 4 show the beginning of the conflict between Jesus and the Jews. The story that has become known as the cleansing of the temple is told on the third Sunday. Jesus is clearly angry that people are 'turning my Father's house into a market'. [Jn 2:15] What the Jews failed to grasp, however, is that Jesus is thinking not of the temple building in Jerusalem 'but he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body....' [Jn. 2:22] Jesus lays down His life so that His people (His body) may have life and have it to the full. He is aware that the Jews do not grasp the new vision of worship: 'true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth'. [Jn 4:20] Pope Benedict XVI points out in *Caritas in Veritate*: 'Integral human development requires a transcendent vision of the person, it needs God'. [CV, par 11] Jesus is also showing that man's relationship with God is inseparable from his relationship with his neighbour. The anger of Jesus is not so much directed against the defilement of the temple in Jerusalem as at the abuse meted out to his people, his body.

The interplay between good and evil, light and darkness, truth and falsehood is brought to a more explicit level in the gospel of the fourth Sunday. It is through 'the lifting up' of God's 'only Son' that the world will be saved. [cf. Jn 3:14-18] Jesus is driving home His message: 'The man who lives by the truth comes out into the light'. [Jn 3:20] The gospel for the third Sunday had already shown that Jesus sees to the heart, and that he 'did not trust himself' to those who were avoiding the light. [cf. Jn 2:24] Emphasising the importance of truth and light, Pope Benedict says: 'Truth is the light that gives meaning and value to charity - it grasps its meaning as gift, acceptance and communion'. [CV, par 3]

All the elements of journey mentioned above are present in our lives too. We constantly seek meaning in our own lives, moving between desert and mountain experience, between being alone and tempted in the wilderness and being affirmed by the Father and supported by trusted companions. We are constantly becoming aware of the meaning of our own being in the world. As Martin Heidegger says, 'One might call the root nature of human being awareness, an awareness that is concerned about its own being-in-the-world. On the basis of this concern about its own being-in-the-world, human being is then able to be concerned and take care of other being'. But as Benedict XVI says: 'The risk for our time is that the defacto interdependence of people and nations is not matched by ethical interaction of consciences and minds that would give rise to fully human development.' [CV, par 3]

As Christians and as Vincentians we are aware that our relationship with our fellowmen is an integral part of our relationship with God, and we know that our struggle to bring truth and justice into our world will often lead us into conflict with those in authority. However we believe with Pope Benedict that 'Fidelity to man requires fidelity to the truth, which alone is the guarantee of freedom.' [CV, par 9] Journeying with Jesus through Lent helps us in our own journey of life. Jesus struggled to understand the meaning of His life, but the clear message of the gospels for the first four Sundays of Lent is that His relationship with His Father and His relationship with His people are intricately interwoven. He gives His life that His people 'may have life and have it to the full'. [Jn 10:10]

Sr. Claire Sweeney D.C.