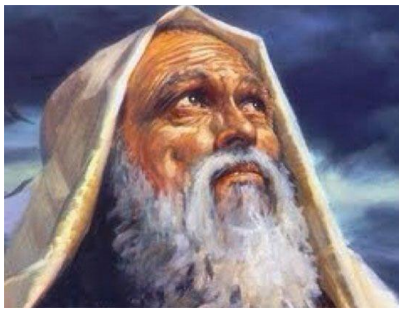


Grace Notes for the Fifth Week of Lent, March 19, 2021

Dear Friends:

This Sunday's First Reading spoke to us of covenant and is a lead-in to the new covenant that God makes with us through Jesus. In order for us to understand the intense meaning of the New Covenant, it may help for us to revisit the meaning of covenant in the context of our relationship with God. It may surprise us to recognise how many covenants are described in the Scriptures. We start with the covenant God made



with Noah, never again to suspend nature to punish the people. Then God promised to make Abraham the father of a great people and that Abraham and his descendants must obey God; in return God would guide and protect them and give them the land of Israel. This covenant was sealed by the sign of circumcision. Next there was the covenant made through Moses in which

the Ten Commandments became the rule through which God's people would follow him. Finally came the covenant made with David, that one of his descendants would ascend to the throne to keep the promises of God to make of Abraham a great nation and give them their own land. Then in Jeremiah 31:31 we read, "The days are coming," declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah." This is the prophecy which Jesus acknowledges in Luke 22:14-20 at the Passover meal: When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

Although the dictionary may tell us that synonyms for covenant are words like bargain, or contract or deal, in faith we understand that the covenants with God are something much deeper, far more than a signature on a document and written in our hearts. Here is Bishop Robert Barron's homily on the subject.

<https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/homily/writing-the-law-upon-our-hearts/30260/>



It is also important for us as Christians to recognise that God did not revoke the “Old Covenant” with the Jewish people and that this is the spirit in which Catholic teaching embraces them today. In 1965, Nostra Aetate stated about the Jews, “now as before God holds them as most dear for the sake of the patriarchs; he has not withdrawn his gifts or calling.” Pope St John Paul II also sought to give positive direction to the dialogue, reminding us that “the links between the Church and the Jewish people are grounded in the design of the God of the Covenant” (March 6, 1982). This has not always been the case and we appreciate that the prayer offered on Good Friday now says: “Let us pray also for the Jewish people, to whom the Lord our God spoke first, that he may grant them to advance in love of his name and in faithfulness to his covenant.” The language of this prayer in previous iterations was not nearly as welcoming!



There is much that we share with our Jewish brothers and sisters: parts of our liturgy, our ways of praying, the Scriptures we have in common – although we view them through different lenses. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7dSmy39EeY>



This week I would normally have covered all statues and crosses in the CEC with purple veils. Although not universally practised, it is the custom in many dioceses to cover crosses and images from the Fifth Sunday of Lent until Easter. This is intended to heighten our senses of what is often called “Passiontide” and, at a time when we are more conscious of our “domestic church” because of the limitations of the pandemic, may be something you choose to do at home. Crosses remain covered until after the Celebration of the Lord’s Passion on Good Friday, and images until the beginning of the Easter Vigil, although, in some parishes, the removal of the veil on the central crucifix is woven into the beginning of the liturgy.

Although we won’t be able to process with palms this year on Palm Sunday, perhaps you can find some pussy willows on a walk; these are traditionally used in Orthodox and Eastern Rite Catholic churches in lieu of palms, because of the difficulty of obtaining palms in earlier times.



I leave you with the antiphon for today: “Wait for the Lord; be strong; be stout-hearted and wait for the Lord!”

With every blessing,

Gillian