

An excerpt from "Preaching the Word: Homiletics," *Emmanuel* 115:3 (2009), 269-285, by Fr. Raymond F. Collins.

THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

June 7, 2009

LITURGY

Romans 8:14-17 speaks of the Spirit of adoption who moves believers to call upon God as "Abba, Father."

Matthew 28:16-20 offers Matthew's version of the Great Commission.

Different from the Lukan version of the commission read on the Feast of the Ascension, Matthew's account mentions baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40 is a biblical passage which, obviously, does not speak about the Trinity. It proclaims that among the nations of the earth Israel was the only nation that was privileged to enjoy the experience of God as did Israel.

Israel was the beneficiary of divine revelation, exemplified in God's self-revelation to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3; cf. Exodus 20:18-26). Not only did Israel experience God as the God of revelation, Israel was also privileged to experience God as the God of mighty deeds. The "testings" that Israel experienced were God's demonstrations of power in the ten plagues (Deuteronomy 7:19; 29:2-3; cf. Exodus 7:14-9:32). God inflicted these plagues on Egypt for the benefit of Israel.

The liturgical lection omits the verse that Israel was the beneficiary of this two-fold manifestation of God because it was loved by God (Deut 4:37). Because Israel was the beneficiary of this unique experience of God, God demands that Israel acknowledge God to be the Lord of heaven and earth. Uniquely privileged, Israel was also to acknowledge God by the quality of its life. It was to keep the statutes and commandments of the Lord, among which the precepts of the Decalogue, described shortly thereafter, are preeminent (cf. Deuteronomy 5:6-21).

BROKEN FOR US

It is obvious that, despite the typological reading of the text by various Fathers of the Church, an Old Testament reading is not going to speak about the Trinity. Typically, however, modern theology attributes to the Word the function of being the self-revelation of God. The Spirit is described as the power of God *ad extra*.

Today's first reading highlights each of these functions of the persons of the Trinity, asking us to reflect that already in biblical times there was preparation for God's Trinitarian self-revelation. The reading also indicates that God's revelation calls for an appropriate response. A first response is the acknowledgement of God, the theological virtue of faith. Faith is to be put into practice in love (Galatians 5:6), the essence of the statutes and commandments that God has given us (Matthew 22:40; cf. James 2:8).

An excerpt from "Preaching the Word: Homiletics," *Emmanuel* 115:3 (2009), 269-285, by Fr. Raymond F. Collins.

THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

June 14, 2009

LITURGY

Hebrews 9:11-15 compares Jesus' self-sacrifice with the sacrifices of the temple in Jerusalem.

Mark 14:12-16, 22-26 is Mark's description of the Passover meal during which Jesus instituted the celebration of the eucharist.

Exodus 24:3-8 describes the ceremony in which the people ratify the covenant that God has made with them. Moses initiates the ceremony by recalling the Ten Commandments, the words of the Lord, and the case law contained in the Book of the Covenant, the ordinances (Exodus 20:22-23:33). These functioned as the covenant provisions to which Israel was bound.

Since the people agreed to the prescriptions, Moses transcribed them, perhaps for reading during a covenant renewal ceremony (see Exodus 17:14; 34:27-28; Numbers 33:2; Deuteronomy 31:9, 22 as biblical descriptions of other occasions when Moses wrote). The participation of the entire people is symbolized by the erection of twelve pillars, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. The altar signifies the presence of God.

With everything prepared, the ceremony begins with the offering of holocausts, bulls, and peace offerings to the Lord (see Leviticus 1, 3). The blood of the animals, symbolic of life, is gathered in large bowls. Half of the blood is poured on the altar, symbolizing Yahweh's participation in the covenant. Then Moses read the Book of the Covenant, with the people once again agreeing to its demands. Then Moses sprinkles the remaining half of the blood on the people. The shared blood symbolized the vital covenant, a bond and communion of life, between Yahweh and his people.

The blood that was shared is described as the "blood of the covenant," an expression reprised by Matthew and Paul in their respective accounts of the Institution of the Eucharist (Matthew 26:28; 1 Corinthians 11:25).

BROKEN FOR US

The reading from the Book of Exodus is a vivid reminder of an aspect of the eucharist that is often overlooked, namely, that it is a covenant meal, symbolically celebrated. With its iteration of the fact that the people accepted the precepts of the covenant, Exodus reminds us that a covenant ritual makes little sense apart from the life, in union with God, that it expresses. As the Hebrews accepted the demands of the covenant before participating in the blood ritual, so Christians should live the new covenant in their lives before they celebrate the eucharistic ritual.

The Exodus reading with its recall of the erection of the twelve pillars and its frequent mention of the people, also reminds us that the covenant celebration is a celebration of a people with its God. The celebration of the eucharist is a

An excerpt from "Preaching the Word: Homiletics," *Emmanuel* 115:3 (2009), 269-285, by Fr. Raymond F. Collins.

community celebration in which individuals take part. Without the community the eucharist makes little or no sense.

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

June 21, 2009

LITURGY

2 Cor 5:14-17 speaks about the believer's appropriate reaction to the death of Christ.

Mark 4:35-41 describes Jesus stilling the storm.

Job 38:1, 8-11, one of the two Sunday liturgical lections from the Book of Job recounts part of a theophany. And may the reader excuse my overly enthusiastic plea for preaching about Job on page 81 of the January-February issue of *Emmanuel* in which I stated that Job appeared only once on a Sunday in the three-year liturgical cycle!

The first verse of the reading is an introduction to the first of two lengthy discourses (cf. Job 40:1) by the Lord who intervenes in the debate between Job and his friends. The Lord's name, "Yahweh," occurs in verse 1 for the first time in Job since the opening chapters of the book (Job 1-2).

As is often the case in the Hebrew scriptures, a storm serves as a setting for a theophany (Psalms 18, 50; Nahum 1, 3; Habakkuk 3). The Hebrew term for storm, *se'arah*, also meaning whirlwind (see 2 Kings 2:1, 11), is frequently used in reference to divine anger. Thus the setting of the theophany symbolizes divine displeasure at the tenor of the discussion between Job and his friends.

The rhetorical question in the liturgical reading is designed to motivate humility in the human auditors. Humans must recognize that they are inferior to God. In verses 8-9 God, the Creator, is described as giving birth to the sea, the clouds, and darkness. Reference to the womb and swaddling clothes evoke the event of a birth and the wrapping of a new-born. Parental imagery continues in verses 10-12 as Yahweh self-describes himself as setting limits, preventing "his children" from doing harm or being harmed.

The warmth of the imagery contrasts with the angry curse of Job in 3:3-8.

BROKEN FOR US

The storm is the obvious link between today's first and third readings. Both readings describe a theophany. In Mark Jesus manifests divine power by calming the storm, asserting divine power over an unruly sea and leading his disciples to wonder about his identity. In Job, Yahweh describes himself as the creator and provident God. Yahweh has created the sea and other elements in the universe and has set limits upon their power.

It has sometimes been said that the great moral and political issue of the twenty-first century will be the use of the world's water supply. Believers stand in awe at the water that God has

An excerpt from "Preaching the Word: Homiletics," *Emmanuel* 115:3 (2009), 269-285, by Fr. Raymond F. Collins.

created. In faith they marvel at the power of the sea, so often destructive yet so capable of providing energy. With a prayer of gratitude they thank God for water, with its many different uses.

Water allows animals and humans alike to drink. Water allows crops to grow. Water nurtures the fish that we eat. A person of faith can only look at the water that God has created with awe and reverence.

There is, however, a large number of ethical issues that arise from the water that God has created. One is the availability of clean water for people to drink, a two-pronged moral dilemma which involves both the avoidance of polluting and the distribution of water to those who need it. Another ethical challenge is the conservation of water so that it might serve the multiple purposes for which God created it. Yet another is the over-fishing of seas and rivers. Akin is the issue of global-warming and the melting of the polar ice caps. None of these moral issues should escape the concern of a person of faith who professes that God has created the waters, bringing them forth from the womb and wrapping them in swaddling clothes.

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

June 29, 2009

LITURGY

2 Cor 8:7, 9, 13-15 portrays the gracious generosity of Jesus as an example to be followed by the church at Corinth as it prepares to help the saints in Jerusalem.

Mark 5:21-43 describes Jesus raising of the twelve-year old daughter of Jairus from the dead and his healing of the woman with the abnormal menstrual flow.

Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24 is a composite reading from an inspired work by a Hellenistic Jewish author, conventionally known as Pseudo-Solomon, who wrote about a century before Christ. Immortality is the dominant theme of the first part of the book (Wisdom 1:1-6:21). The theme of immortality clearly dominates the exposition of the author's thought until Wisdom 5:23.

In the first of the assembled passages in today's reading, Pseudo-Solomon affirms that God has made human beings for immortality. Death is the antithesis of what God wants for the men and women that he has created. He finds no pleasure in the death of the beings that he has created. Immortality is not, however, due to the spiritual nature of the human soul. Rather it results from the relationship with God that the describes as justice or righteous. In the author's view, it is this relationship that is undying. Hence, passage from this life-death in the ordinary, everyday sense of the term-is not death, as the understands death.

Pseudo-Solomon returns to the theme of immortality in an excerpt of chapter two that has been incorporated into today's composite liturgical reading. He affirms that God has created

An excerpt from "Preaching the Word: Homiletics," *Emmanuel* 115:3 (2009), 269-285, by Fr. Raymond F. Collins.

humankind for incorruption. The proof? We have been created in the image of God, a deliberate divine act (cf. Genesis 1:26-27). It is the devil who is the cause of death. The devil's envy brought death to human beings (cf. Genesis 3:1-7; 22-23). Those who express allegiance to the devil by their evil actions and malicious words will experience death (see Wisdom 1:16).

BROKEN FOR US

Jesus' raising the daughter of Jairus from the dead, despite the obstacle of distance and notwithstanding the fact that mourners were already present when Jesus arrived at the house of the synagogue official, serves both as a foreshadowing of the resurrection in which we shall participate through Jesus and as a sign that God, represented through Jesus, his agent, does not will death.

Pseudo-Solomon reflects, almost philosophically, on the nature of human mortality. It is noteworthy however that, although he lived in Alexandria, a center for the study of philosophy, his argument is religious rather than philosophic.

He grounds human immortality in the creative act of God. We humans have been created in God's image and likeness, "the image of his own nature" (Wisdom 2:23), that is, the image and likeness of the immortal God. A second basis for human immortality is righteousness or justice, that is, human's right relationship with God, and with one another.

From each of these two points of view, the basis of human immortality is not the nature of the soul; it is rather the quality of a human being's relationship with God. Thus understood, immortality is a gift from God rather than an innate characteristic of human existence.