

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Jul 10th 2015

The psalm for today may provide the theme for all of the readings: “The salvation of the just comes from the Lord.” “Trust in the Lord and do good, that you may dwell in the land and be fed in security.” A few other topics also emerge: famine, family strife, drought, immigration, estrangement, reconciliation, nation building, and political favor. As this cycle unfolds and repeats in the scriptures, and indeed, in our own experiences, I find that the steadfast rock is the promise of God to be with us as we travel, not only as individuals, but as gatherings of the faithful.

The first of the readings today centers on a journey that Isaac’s son, Jacob (also called Israel), and his family undertook in order to escape the extensive famine being experienced in Canaan. They travelled to the, even then, ancient site of Beersheba where, it was said, Abraham had dug wells. As they camped there, Jacob had a vision in which God called him by name. “Here I am,” Jacob responded.

We can only hope that our own response to God’s call will be as simple, rapid, and open to God’s words. God followed with the assurance that it would be safe to travel into Egypt where they could find food and water, even during the drought that enveloped most of the region. God not only assured their safety, but also said that He would go with them, and ultimately bring them back to Canaan. What an amazing offer!

“No worries”, they must have thought; God is with us. The area of Egypt that they were traveling to was Goshen in the Nile delta. The land there was fertile and could support herdsman and their families.

The journey was facilitated by Jacob’s long-lost son, Joseph, who had been sold into slavery by his brothers. He obviously had risen significantly in stature, since he now was one of the most powerful and influential leaders of Egypt. Pharaoh even provided wagons to make the family’s journey more manageable. The trip from Beersheba would have taken over ten days if they could manage to keep up a brisk pace in the desert heat. As they approached Goshen, Joseph himself rode to meet them in a chariot. They clearly were welcomed by Joseph, who had been so terribly wronged by many of his brothers. Joseph’s attitude certainly foreshadows the words of the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” The large family was reunited, cared for, safe, and able to thrive. God was with them. The salvation of the just is from the Lord. Learn to forgive, love one another, and travel with the Lord.

The gospel for this day is brief and to the point. Jesus tells his disciples that they are about to be sent out to spread His word. They will be like sheep among the wolves when they do this. The wolves represent those who would hand them over to the authorities, scourge them, or make them bear witness in the courts. He assures them that they will be able to defend themselves. Jesus indicates a need for pragmatism in His advice to be as shrewd as a serpent, but as gentle or simple as a dove in their interactions with others. When the time comes, the Spirit of the Father will speak through them. Whoever perseveres will be saved. The reminder that we will be tested because of our faith could frighten many, but we are assured that the Father is with us. The prospect of facing not only crises, but

everyday burdens without this assurance would be a crushing burden. As you continue your journey, remember that God has promised to be with us, to be our guide, and to help us to find the courage to spread His word.

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