

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Feb. 9&10, 2019 – Reflection

“Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the lord of hosts! Then one of the seraphim flew to me, holding an ember he had taken with tongs from the altar. He touched my mouth with it, and said, ‘See, now that this has touched your lips, your wicked is removed, your sin purged.’ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?’ ‘Here I am,’ I said, ‘send me!’”

(From the Prophet Isaiah)

Last week we spoke of rejection. The Prophet Jeremiah was rejected by the Hebrew people to whom he was sent by God because he dared speak truth to them. They didn’t want to hear him; they didn’t want to change or repent and turn back to the Lord, and so they rejected God too!

The Lord Jesus, when He moved among the people of His own home town of Nazareth, was rejected by His own neighbors and kin. How could this hometown boy possibly speak in the name of God? How could God be His Father ... after all, we know His father, Joseph who used to live right down the road; Joseph who was just a carpenter, no better than any of us?!!

Adam and Eve rejected their Creator in the story of the Garden of Eden. The serpent promised them the forbidden fruit would make them like God, better even ... but they surely wouldn't die. They bit into the lie of the serpent; their pride and arrogance rejected any Creator, anyone who would tell them what they could and could not do. What fools we are to believe the Liar, what pompous blind fools we can be! Forbidden fruit was then, and is now, poison. Human pride and arrogance and self-sufficiency stand on feet of clay that will always and inevitably crumble and fall.

Scientists and secularists reject the existence of what is unseen: they reject spirits, angels, devils as quaint superstitions from an ancient and naïve past. Communists and atheists and even capitalists run amok reject God as an opium for the people, a crutch for the simple, an anchor for the poor. There is no God, unless god is the state, god is the whole man, god is the almighty dollar.

The bible has a rather different take on reality. The bible tells us of a Creator of "all things, seen and unseen." The bible tells us of encounters with angels come to bring the word of the Lord: Abraham's three strangers who promise him and Sarah the son of their old age, Isaac; Jacob's wrestling partner; Moses' angelic voice in the burning bush; the Hebrews pillar of fire in the desert leading them and guiding them to the Promised Land of Canaan; Zachariah's dumbfounding encounter in the temple; Mary's Annunciation; Joseph's dreams; Jesus' support in Gethsemane; the young man seated in the tomb dressed in white proclaiming to astonished women, "He is risen, He is not here!"

And in the biblical unseen world, there is a dark side too: the serpent in Paradise; Satan tempting Jesus in the desert; Legion possessing poor

humans; breathing darkness into the heart of Judas Iscariot and kissing the Savior to the Cross.

And today, Isaiah rejects God's call because he and his people are unclean. As God asked hiding Adam in the Garden, "Who told you you were naked?" Who told you that? Today, Simon the fisherman rejects Jesus' call, "Leave me Lord, for I am a sinful man."

It is Satan who inflates himself. It is Satan who whispers to our egos how great and in-charge we are. And it is Satan, when we fall, who tempts us to hopelessness and despair, who throws us out as unworthy of God's mercy, or attention, call or mission.

When I was a five year old in first grade at Holy Family School, my teacher's name was Sister Mary Angelita ... Sister Mary Little Angel. She always used ink stamps of angels to grade my papers. Once in a while, I would get the trumpet-blowing seraphim that said "EXCELLENT" in big block letters; but most often, I would get the smiling, friendly angel that said, "Very Good ... Keep Trying." Sister taught us what the Church teaches, what the bible teaches ... that God has given to each of us an angel to care for us, to inspire us, to guide us, to lead us to God and in Godly ways; an angel to lift us when we fall, to lead us back to Jesus when we stray, to guard us until we come safely back to the Garden.

I don't see my angel. I don't see my God. I don't see love. I don't see hope. But I know they are real. My faith tells me so. And, I know I am loved, and no matter how much I may screw up, God has a plan for me.

"Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here;
ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide."

Amen.