

Rejoicing in God's Love

By: Fr. Munachi E. Ezeopu, CSSP

“Rejoice, Jerusalem! Be glad for her, you who love her; rejoice with her, you who mourned for her” (Entrance Antiphon — Isaiah 66:10-11). Why does the church invite us in the middle of the penitential season of Lent to rejoice? The story of a little incident that took place in Mainz in 1456 when Gutenberg was printing the first printed Bible can help us with the answer.

The printer had a little daughter, Alice, who came into the printing press and picked up a discarded sheet with only one line of print. That line of print read: **“God loved the world so much that he gave...”** Now, those were times when popular religion was a matter of living in fear and trembling before the awesome wrath of God. So Alice put the paper in her pocket and kept on thinking of the fact of God being so loving, and her face radiated with joy. Her mother noticed her changed behavior and asked Alice what was making her so happy and Alice showed her mother the sheet of paper with the printed line. Her mother looked at it for some time and said, “So, what did God give?” “I don’t know,” said Alice, “but if God loved us well enough to give us something, then we need not be so afraid of Him.”

What is love? What does it mean to say God love us? To understand what the Bible means by God’s love we must bear in mind that whereas the Greek language has three different words for three different types of love English has only one. In Greek we have (1) **eros** meaning romantic love (like the love between a man and a woman that leads to marriage), (2) **philia** meaning fellowship love (like the love for football which brings people together to form a fan club), and there is (3) **agape** or sacrificial love (like the love that makes a mother risk her own life for her yet unborn child). In romantic love we long to receive, in fellowship love we long to share, in sacrificial love we long to give. Now, with what kind of love does God love us? God loves us with agape or sacrificial love. “God loved the world so much that He gave.” That is one big difference between God and

us: God gives and forgives, we get and forget. Giving is a sign of agape. This is the kind of love God has for us. This is the kind of love we should have for one another. This is the kind of love that is lived in heaven. And where this kind of love is absent, what you get is hell.

A certain saint asked God to show her the difference between heaven and hell. So God sent an angel to take her, first to hell. There she saw men and women seated around a large table with all kinds of delicious food. But none of them was eating. They were all sad and yawning. The saint asked one of them, “Why are you not eating?” And he showed her his hand. A long fork about 4ft long was strapped to their hands such that each time they tried to eat they only threw the food on the ground. “What a pity” said the saint. Then the angel took her to heaven. There the saint was surprised to find an almost identical setting as in hell: men and women sitting round a large table with all sorts of delicious food, and with a four-foot fork strapped to their arms. But unlike in hell, the people here were happy and laughing. “What!” said the saint to one of them, “How come you are happy in this condition?” “You see,” said the man in heaven, “Here we feed one another.” Can we say that of our families, our neighborhood, our church, our world? If we can say that, then we are not far from the kingdom of heaven.

Today the Church invites us to reflect on God’s love for the world and to be joyful because of it. God loves each and everyone of us, so much so that He gives us His only son. Today we are invited to say yes to God’s love. It is sometimes hard to believe that God loves even me, But I believe it because I know that God’s love’s unconditionally; no ifs, no buts. Then we can love God back and enter into a love relationship with God. Then, like little Alice, our faces will radiate the joy of God’s love. Then we shall learn to share God’s love with those around us. Then we shall learn to give to God and to one another, just as God gave us.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

1 Samuel 16:1-3 Ephesians 5:8-14 John 9:1-41

March 15, 2015

靈 修 生 活

一 切 恩 寵 都 是 從 十 字 架 來 的

曾 慶 導 神 父

一位在美國天主教大學執教二十多年的教師，對他絕大部份信仰天主教的學生做了一個調查。他向他的學生提出這個問題：「如果你今晚就離世並見到天主，天主問為什麼要讓你進天堂，你會怎樣回答？」他發現，被詢問的學生大都不知道正確的答案。他們的答案甚至沒有提到耶穌的名字，他們認為他們是靠善意而得救，靠作一個討人喜歡的人、誠懇的人，或靠自己盡心盡力做善事等等。但今天讀經二給的答案卻不是這樣：「你們的得救是由於恩寵，藉著信德，所以得救並不是出於你們自己，而是天主的恩惠；不是出於善行，以免有人自誇。」

福音最基本的真理可在今天的福音裡看到：「天主這樣愛了世人，竟賜下了自己的獨生子，使凡信祂的人不致喪亡，反而獲得永生。」「天主富於慈悲，由於祂對我們的深情大愛，在我們因過犯死了的時候，卻使我們和基督一同生活，我們的得救是由於恩寵」(讀經二)。「我們是全憑天主豐厚的恩寵，在祂的愛子內，藉祂愛子的血，獲得了救贖，罪過的赦免」(弗一 7)。這些經文雖然簡短，所指出天主慈愛的寬廣高深卻令我們感動、震撼。福音的根本，「不是我們愛了天主，而是天主愛了我們」(若壹四 10)，是祂的愛創造了我們，也是祂的愛救贖了我們。對這樣的愛，我們人是不堪當的，若不是基督，我們是「昏愚的、悖逆的、迷途的，受各種貪欲和逸樂所奴役，在邪惡和嫉妒中度日，自己是可憎的，又彼此仇恨」(鐸三 3-7)。這樣生活的後果，就如今天讀經一中屢教不改的猶太人的命運一樣：敵人焚毀了上主的聖殿，拆除了耶路撒冷的城牆，燒毀全城所有的宮殿，破壞了城內珍貴的器皿，凡是沒有死於刀下的人，都被擄到巴比倫去作巴比倫王和他子孫的奴僕。

福音含有一個永恆的幅度，若沒有基督，我們的生活將是人間地獄。除非我們藉信仰獲得恩寵，從這罪惡與黑暗轉入美善與光明，不然這種人間地獄會變成越來越烈的永久狀態。在宣講福音時，我們應該用一個正面的、吸引人的方法來表達福音，但也不能用沉默來否認地獄，以迎合俗化的社會和文化的要求，否則我們會大大地削弱福音的能力，淡化它的真理，也失去了傳教的基本動力。如果死後沒有審判，不會有人下地獄；如果到頭來有沒有悔改、有沒有相信、有沒有領洗都一樣，那麼我們為什麼還要傳教？救贖的中心是天主子的謙遜和自我犧牲(斐二 6-8)，我們也應謙遜地承認自己的罪過，籍由信德來服從(悔改)。我們需要的是謙遜地「接受」救贖，而不是自以為是地「創造」救贖。人所能誇耀的，只能是基督的十字架(格前一 27-31)。

耶穌講公審判(瑪廿五 31-46)時，自比是無家可歸的人、坐監的人、患病的人，所以不是「不管信不信基督，只要做好事就可獲救」。人的得救絕對是因基督十字架的寶血才有可能，我們對鄰人的愛德，是為還報基督救贖的大愛而做的回應，是信仰的表現。但如果沒有基督的十字架，我們無法獲救進天國，甚至無力去實踐任何愛的行動。一切都是天主的恩寵。「原來我們是天主在基督耶穌內受造的，為的是要我們在生活中行各種善事，就是天主預先安排要我們做的」(讀經二)，在十字架的先決條件下，人的回應(即愛德、善功)確實是對得救與否有決定性的作用。

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 五 年 三 月 十 五 日

撒 上 16:1-3; 弗 5:8-14; 若 9:1-41