

**Catholic Church of the Beatitudes
Santa Barbara, CA**

Third Sunday in Lent, Cycle C – March 3, 2013

Jeannette B. Love

Reflections on **Ex 3:1-8, 13-15; 1Cor 10:1-6, 10-12; Luke 13:1-9**

In the first reading from the book of Exodus we accompany Moses as he sees not a burning bush, but—as this translation tells us—“a blazing fire from the midst of the bush.” When I read that subtle difference in meaning it reminded me of our theme: our Lenten embers, when set free of the ash, will blaze with the fire of Divine Love dwelling in our midst.

Moses heard the voice of the Divine proclaiming that this ground is “holy.” Taking off his sandals, Moses’ feet touched the earth. Did he feel the Divine energy course through his body from the earth made “holy” by God’s visible and audible presence? I wonder!

Then Moses heard directly from God, described in our *Inclusive Lectionary* as “the God of your ancestors, the God of Sarah and Abraham, the God of Rebecca and Isaac, the God of Leah and Rachel and Jacob.” This is a reminder, well understood in our community, that the Divine loves women and men equally.

How I wish that Moses had hid his face, afraid to look at the Holy One, after fully realizing how much the Israelites had failed to see and live out that equality!

Our lectionary omits the next section in Exodus where Moses tries to back out of God’s call, by saying “Who am I to go to the Pharaoh?” But God does not back down and instead stands behind Moses with the promise to be with him. He gives the Israelites the name which reveals a new relationship with their God. The name given is an incompre-

hensible mystery. This name might be translated as “I am *as* I am.”

In Hebrew, the form of the verb “to be” used here means a *continuing action*, giving the sense of God’s being *always* with them. In this new revelation, God implies continuing involvement as well as the promise of deliverance for the Israelites.

It seems that the way God interacts with us is influenced by the way we respond to God’s ever-present grace. We are not just puppets in God’s hands. God does invite us into an ever-deeper relationship, but we know that a relationship is a two-way street. As we accept this invitation and live out the call, like Moses, we may think that what God is asking of us is not something we feel capable of doing. However, when our relationship with the Divine becomes a committed one, then,

- when in need, God comes as a provider;
- when afraid, God comes to comfort and strengthen us;
- when willful, God comes as a disciplinarian.

Sometimes God comes in the burning bush to catch us by surprise, plunging us into mystery. God will come in whatever way we might need divine aid: sometimes not in a way that we would choose, but always in a way that leads us to transformation.

In Paul’s epistle to the Church at Corinth, he communicates to us through God’s creation by using the metaphors of cloud and water, referring to our baptism, and through spiritual food and drink, alluding to Christ being the “spiritual rock” that followed and

nourished them. In the end Paul strongly tells us to stand tall in doing God's will, lest we fall and are left behind in the desert of our lives. It seems that Paul is reminding us to keep walking through our deserts. We will then know that our daily Baptisms through cloud and water, and our Eucharists through the strong bread of daily challenges and the nurturing support of a community, will fill us with strength.

As Bishop Remi De Roo would express our call, we need to "love people into wholeness." This God of polarities draws us close by forgiving our offenses, and calls us to account when we have harmed our sisters and brothers.

As we turn to Luke's Gospel, we notice that it is rather strong—a good Lenten Gospel! We are being shown that we do not know if death will call us suddenly. Luke says twice in this passage to *change your ways! Change your ways!* It seems like the Divine is calling us to mature spiritually during this season of throwing off the ash of laziness and inertia, or being merely lukewarm in answering our call. I guess God knows that these qualities lead to a type of death that makes us lethargic; we can slide into a spiritual coma that leads to spiritual death.

Can we *change our ways*? God invites us through Baptism and the Eucharist to take our place and become living Gospels. Given the urgency of our suffering world, God needs us to wake up, accept the invitation to *change our ways*, and be the light in the midst of the darkness that seems to surround us.

We are asked as Christians to let go of our childish ways of wanting to be taken care of by God, and instead take care of those longing to be loved back to life.

As our Lenten song tells us, now is the time to throw off the ash that covers the embers so that they may burn with fiery, reso-

lute purpose. We have many opportunities to stand up for justice and right the wrongs and anguish thrust upon our sisters and brothers.

Vatican II tells us that we are to have a preferential option for the poor. We are to help our sisters and brothers, if newly housed, to stay housed. We are to listen to the stories of the undocumented, who fear separation from their families; to bring a warm smile and genuine friendship of presence to hospice patients; and to encourage a loved one to climb back from depression. With the budget cuts going into effect, there will be thousands more seeking food and shelter. Confusion will abound.

What part do we play in the parable of the barren fig tree in the midst of our world? What is our role? As the pruning of "sequestration" takes place in our country, will we be there to soothe the aching spirit of the new marginalized? Will we fertilize this tree of life with frequent random acts of kindness? If the fig tree continues to be barren, do we mourn its loss, while at the same time nurturing the new creative growth wherever we see it? Will we *change our ways* and become more active when we hear God's call? That answer is ours to give—when we are ready.

In a few weeks we will celebrate the opportunity to *change our ways* by entering into our High Holy Days, as Vatican II called the 72-hour Easter Triduum. This is our yearly opportunity as a community to go deeper and answer our Baptismal call with fire in our belly—that burning bush! This is the time in the church year of intense communal prayer, ritual, and soul-searching; not only for us, but also for the Church and the world.

We belong to a world that too often is in darkness, that does not speak out and act for justice, and that continues to shun the marginalized and ignore their voices.

Fr. Greg Boyle says of his Homeboys and Homegirls—kids who belong to gangs and often have prison records—that they carry and express seeds of wisdom. If we would

honor how much suffering they bear, they could become our teachers.

When we enter fully into the 72-hour day of the Triduum it has the power to transform. Matthew Fox reminds us that “as we age, or rather *sage*, there is no such thing as Gospel

retirement—but rather Gospel *refirement*.” May our Lenten embers be released from the heavy ash of inaction around justice issues; and may we *change our ways* so we can once again live with the “fire in the belly” of our burning bush, where the Divine dwells.

Let us enter the quiet place within
(adapted from Joyce Rupp)

Ash heavy, grey and entombed,
flies and scatters.
Embers smoldering with the weight of ash
ever so wearily push through to flame...

Divine Challenger,
when did I stop risking?

When did I start pretending
that what I now know
is all there is to know?

When did I let uncertainty
press against my free spirit?

When did I give away
my ability to be disturbed?

When did I start refusing to
pay the price for fuller depth and joy?

When did I let panic
of the unknown future
wrap its barbed wire fingers
around my desire to grow?...

But a quiet day will finally come
when the deep, heavy ash is blown asunder
and I am ready for the resurrected embers
to burst fiery and free.

And in my waiting heart,
the released embers will
blaze strong and intense with love. Amen.