

HOMILETICS

By

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1. BIBLICAL NOTES FOR FEBRUARY

FIFTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

(February 3, 1980)

First Reading: Isaiah 6:1-2a. 3-8

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 (or 15:3-8.11)

Gospel Reading: Luke 5:1-11

First Reading: The following verses form part of the Prologue of the so-called Book of Immanuel (Isaiah 7:1-12:6). It is the inaugural vision of the Prophet Isaiah which happened in the year of King Uzziah's death, 740 B.C. The reign of King Uzziah was characterized by prosperity and agricultural development. His death was a loss to the kingdom and reaffirms man's mortality. On the other side of the picture Yahweh's transcendence was manifested to Isaiah in this vision. Israel's prosperity was not exactly due to the king who was a mere mortal but to God. The threefold repetition of the word "holy" indicates the superlative degree. Yahweh is holy in a super-eminent degree. The sign of the divine presence is shown by the smoke as the cloud which enveloped the Ark of the Covenant in the desert (Exodus 40:34). "What a wretched state I am in! I am lost,..." Isaiah was filled with awe: "could a man see God and live?" (Exodus 33:20). "With this (live coal) he touched my mouth" (verse 7) symbolizing the prophet's purification through God's initiative.

Second Reading: Paul's doctrine in this text is about the fact of the resurrection, occasioned probably by some Corinthians who deny the resurrection of the body. But there is resurrection of the body proven by Christ's resurrection. The death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord is proven by the Scriptures, citing in this respect Isaiah 53 on the Suffering Servant and Psalm 16:8-11; then by witnesses: first Christ appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve (stereotype expression for the apostolic college); then to more than 500, to James, again to the Apostles and finally to Paul, who was an "ektroma", one untimely born. Paul omits the apparition to the women mentioned in the gospels perhaps because under Jewish law only men are considered responsible witnesses.

Gospel Reading: The story of the call of Peter is paralleled in Mark 1:16-20 but without the miraculous catch of fishes. It is quite improbable that Mark could have forgotten this miraculous catch previous to the call of Peter as his gospel was influenced by Peter himself. The last part, nevertheless, is parallel to the story of John 21:1-11 after the resurrection. It seems probable that Luke here combines different events to emphasize symbolically the fuller significance of Simon Peter's call. The center of the story is Peter. Andrew is not even mentioned.

Unlike the other Evangelists who speak of the Sea of Galilee Luke calls it properly as the Lake of Gennesaret, for it is really a lake. It is an oblong shape body of water about 21 kilometers long and 12 kilometers wide, fresh water and abounding with fish even today. Gennesaret is a place north-west of the Lake. St. Luke prefers the greek title "Epistata" (v. 5) meaning "Master" rather than the hebrew Rabbi probably because of his greek readers. In v. 8 there was a change from "Master" to "Lord" a term reserved to a divinity. In v. 10 Luke presents Jesus speaking only to Simon whereas in Mark 1:17 he addressed first Simon and Andrew and afterwards James and John. Then "they left everything," a phrase proper to Luke as the Evangelist of total renunciation showing the apostolic response a heroic one.

SIXTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (February 10, 1980)

First Reading: Jeremiah 17:5-8
Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:12,16-20
Gospel Reading: Luke 6:17,20-26

First Reading: These wisdom sayings in Jeremiah are observed to be closely parallel to Psalm 1. However this idea of the just man compared to a fertile tree is found in many sapiential texts, like Proverbs 3:18; 11:13; Psalm 52:10; Sirach or Ecclesiasticus 24:13. The style or literary form of these verses is of "blessings" and "curses" frequent in biblical literature. Some scholars think that Psalm 1 is dependent on this text from Jeremiah since in that Psalm the "trust in Yahweh" (v. 7) is substituted by "trust in the Law of Yahweh" (v. 2) which is characteristic of the post-exilic period. The message of the text is clear: the man who puts his trust in God has no worry in time of distress, will always remain strong and never ceases to bear fruit.

Second Reading: A continuation of last Sunday's second reading. After Paul has proven from many witnesses that Christ has truly risen he adds an argument *ex absurdo*. If Christ had not risen from the dead his preaching would have been a waste of time and our faith would have been utterly useless. In fact Christ's resurrection is the culminating event of the history of salvation. With Christ man conquered sin, Satan, and death. All Christians share in this risen life by their incorporation in Christ through baptism. Christ is the first fruit of all those who have fallen asleep". As the offering of the first fruit symbolizes the offering of the entire fruits or harvest to God, so also the resurrection of Christ as the first includes the resurrection of all who are united with him.

Gospel Reading: Counting the introduction "blessed" or "happy" in the parallel passage of Matthew 5:3-12 we can say that Matthew has 9 beatitudes. St. Luke on the other hand has 4 beatitudes and woes or curses. Each beatitude in Luke has its corresponding woes. It can also be observed that Luke uses more direct speech, preferring the second person to the third person of Matthew: "you who are poor," "you who are hungry now", "you who are rich", "you who have your fill now". The underlying hebrew word for "happy" is 'asre as in Psalm 1:1; 32:1; Isaiah 56:2, and not *baruk*, which is a liturgical expression of blessing. 'Asre is translated *makarioi* in greek that is why this literary style is also called a *makarism*.

The "poor", in greek *ptochoi* corresponds to the hebrew 'anawim, the humble, who, being aware of their own insufficiency looks for their sustenance from God alone. This is not, therefore, a social concept but a religious one.

The "curses" or "woes" (verses 24-26) are only found in Luke which serve as the antithesis of the "blessings".

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (February 17, 1980)

First Reading: 1 Samuel 26:2,7-9, 12-13, 22-23

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:45-49

Gospel Reading: Luke 6:27-38

First Reading: This passage is another narrative of how David spared the life of Saul in spite of the fact that Saul had been wanting to kill him. A similar story is given in chapter 24. Joab and Abishai were nephews of David, sons of his sister Zerulah according to 1 Chronicles 2:16. Here David proved his loyalty to Saul as God's anointed at the cost of being banished from his homeland.

Second Reading: After enumerating in the preceding verses some characteristics of a resurrected body: incorruptibility, clarity, agility, and spirituality, St. Paul explains more the last characteristic (vv. 45-49). He distinguishes the **animal-body** which is vivified by the "soul" (**psyche**) and the **spiritual body**, that which is vivified by the "spirit" (**pneuma**). It does not mean that Paul teaches two different principles of life in man. It is the same principle of life which he calls "soul" in so far as it informs the body according to its natural state, while it is called "spirit" when it acts under the influence and motion of the Holy Spirit. Adam was the source of this natural **psychic** life, while the Risen Christ, sending the Holy Spirit and making men sharers of his glorified life is the source of that **spiritual** life. Those who are baptized participate in the life of the Risen Christ. By the action of the Holy Spirit whom he has sent, the baptized are being transformed more and more into Christ's image (cf. 2 Corinthians 3.18), until at his second coming for Parousia, their bodies will become like his risen body: incorruptible, glorious, powerful, spiritual.

Gospel Reading: A parallel passage of this pericope of loving one's enemies is found in Matthew 5:38-48. Similar verses are also found in Romans 12:14; 1 Corinthians 4:12; and 1 John. Animosity is shown in three ways: in thoughts (hate); in words (curse); and in deeds (bad treatment. To show your love: do good to those who hate, bless those who curse, pray for those who maltreat you. In verse 31 we have the golden rule expressed by our Lord in a positive manner: "Treat others as you would like them to treat you". This is found expressed in a negative form in Tobias 4:15, Philo, Confucius, and in the Talmud (Shabbath, 31a). While in Matthew the evildoers were identified as "publicans and Gentiles", St. Luke used the general term of sinners. Finally in v. 36, where St. Matthew uses "be perfect" he has "be compassionate" or "be merciful". In Old Testament usage, compassion or mercy is usually attributed to God. Luke makes this attributes also a goal to be achieved by Christ's disciples.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT (February 24, 1980)

First Reading: Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Second Reading: Romans 10:8-13

Gospel Reading: Luke 4:1-13

First Reading: The following verses from Deuteronomy has been termed by some biblical scholars as the "historical credo" pronounced by the pious Israelite at the offering of the first fruits probably

during the spring festival of Unleavened Bread or "Azymes". The "father" mentioned here as a wandering Aramaean is no other than Jacob whose family is from Aram.

Second Reading: St. Paul makes a contrast of the righteousness or justification which comes from the Mosaic Law and that which comes from faith. He implies that righteousness through the Law requires much effort aside from the fact that it does not perfectly justify, compared with justification through faith which is easy to achieve. "The word, that is the faith we proclaim, is very near to you, it is in your lips and in your heart". The expressions: "confess with the lips", "believe in your heart" indicate the two aspects which Christian faith should have, interior as well as exterior. As the essential object of that confession of faith St. Paul enjoins the believer to profess that "Jesus is Lord", to acknowledge Christ as the giver of salvation. For Paul everyone is called to this new justification, Jews as well as Greeks. The phrase: "those who call on the name of the Lord" (Joel 3:5) is referred to pious Jews, now it is transferred to Christians as in first Corinthians 1:2 and Acts 9:14. Whereas salvation was expected by the Israelites from the Old Testament "Kyrios" or Yahweh, now they are to expect it from the Kyrios whom Yahweh himself instituted as such (Acts 2:36), Christ the Lord.

Gospel Reading: Immediately after baptism the synoptics narrate Jesus temptations in the desert. St. Mark mentions this episode in a very general way. In contrast Matthew and Luke have a detailed account of this temptation but still with remarkable differences dictated more by their respective theology rather than by the exact order of the temptations. The last temptation in Matthew was on a high mountain which is the second in Luke. For this Evangelist the climax of his temptation narrative is Jerusalem. According to Luke's theology Jesus' entire ministry leads towards Jerusalem.

"Filled with the Holy Spirit": these words confirm 3:22 where it is said that the Holy Spirit descended on him. While Matthew places the temptations after our Lord's stay of 40 days in the desert, St. Luke uses the imperfect. "He was being tempted there by the Devil for forty days". (v. 2).

The final observation of Luke that after "having exhausted all these ways of tempting him, the devil left him," but only "to return at the appointed time" could refer to the decisive attack of the devil at the moment of his passion.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT**(March 2, 1980)****First Reading: Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18****Second Reading: Philippians 3:17-4:1****Gospel Reading: Luke 9:28b-36**

First Reading: Biblical critics believe this chapter which speaks of Yahweh's covenant with Abraham to be a compilation from different sources since there seems to be some contradictions in the time element in the narrative. In verse 5 the scene is set at night while in verse 12 the sun was just setting. Only in v. 17 does it become dark. Be as it may for the sources, we have in the text two promises of God: 1) the promise of descendants to Abraham; 2) the giving of the land. For the first promise Abraham put his faith unconditionally in God and he was, therefore, accounted as "just" or "righteous". The hebrew word *sedaqah* translated as "justice" or "righteousness" means right relationship with God which later Christian theology would relate it to sanctifying grace. The second promise was sealed by a covenant. The rite of the covenant was characterized by the slaughtering of the animals and dividing them into two. The contracting parties passed between the two halves to show their willingness to suffer the fate of the animals if they broke the covenant. God passed in between in the form of "a smoking furnace and a firebrand", (v. 18).

Second Reading: "Be united in following my rule of life" (v. 17). Paul offers himself as a model for imitation as he himself is an imitator of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). The "enemies of the cross of Christ" were those who still cling to dietary laws, "making food into their god," and to circumcision which for Paul is a thing they ought to be shameful of. For Christians, their homeland is in heaven, having renounced the things of the earth. The Lord Jesus will then transform their bodies like his own glorious body.

Gospel Reading: The Transfiguration. After the first prediction of his passion (Luke 9:22) Jesus brought his chosen apostles, Peter, John and James to the mountain (a definite mountain for Luke without naming it, although tradition localizes it at Mt. Tabor). There he was transfigured in front of them. This was a foretaste of glory which he also predicted that would come after his passion. "Suddenly there were two men there talking to him; they were Moses and Elijah": Moses representing the Law and Elijah the Prophets. The subject of their conversation was his "departure"

which will be in Jerusalem. This clearly refers to his passion. It is significant that Luke uses the greek word *exodus* referring to the passion of Christ thus confirming the typology of the Old Testament *exodus*. V. 35 is an echo of Christ's baptism. Instead of "the Chosen One" (*ho eklelegmenos*) some manuscripts have *ho agapetos* ("My Beloved") which is probably due to the harmonization between Matthew and Mark. The disciples kept this "messianic secret" until after the resurrection.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT (March 9, 1980)

First Reading: Exodus 3:1-8a. 13-15

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:1-6. 10-12

Gospel Reading: Luke 13:1-9

First Reading: The mountain of God in the Elohist source is commonly called Horeb, while in the Yahvist (J) source it is called Sinai. The "Angel of Yahweh" (v. 2) is a circumlocution meaning Yahweh himself as for instance in Genesis 16:7, 13). There is here a theophany or manifestation of God by means of a spectacular event, a ball of fire on a bush, about to choose or call his human instrument for the deliverance of his chosen people. At the hesitation of Moses God made this assurance: "I shall be with you." For the first time this formula appears in the Bible in this episode which will be echoed afterwards in many calls in the Bible, like that of Gideon, Jeremiah, until the call of the Apostles (Matthew 28:20). With these words the one called is assured of divine protection in the fulfillment of his mission. Still Moses had other difficulties. "What if they ask me your name?" To this question God gave the proper name by which he should henceforth be known: "I Am who I Am". From this first person singular, the name seemed to have been taken in the third person singular masculine of the Qal form, imperfect: "he is". This is written YHWH, the famous tetragrammaton which is pronounced *Yahweh*.

Second Reading: From the history of Israel's wanderings in the desert St. Paul's draws lessons to warn Christians of their own conduct. Many events in the history of Israel prefigured the life of the "new Israel", the Church. In the Exodus-event Paul has drawn forth the typology of the sacraments of baptism: "they were all baptized into Moses in this cloud and in this sea"; and the Eucharist: "all at the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink". Even in our times, then, the Messianic period, "for

us who are living at the end of the age", the episodes of the Old Testament are still addressed to us as a "type" or lesson. The Scriptures, written by God for the Church, is addressed to us members of the Church.

Gospel Reading: This passage invites repentance or what would happen when a person fails to repent. Only Luke has this passage. The episode mentioned in verse 1 about the "Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices" is not mentioned in profane history but is in accord with Pilate's character known from Josephus. Of course the actuation of Pilate is condemnable but the mention of this episode has different aim than to condemn Pilate but rather to warn his hearers of repentance. To the common concept that suffering is the result of sin, Jesus contends that this is not so. There are other Galileans who were greater sinners, but suffered less. Still all sinners will be castigated, if not here in this life, certainly in the next.

Since Luke omitted the cursing of the fig tree found in Mark 11:12-14 and Matthew 21:18-22, he compensated it with the parable of the fig tree which is only found in his gospel. The fig tree is Israel (an image found in Hosea 9:10; Jeremiah 8:13). If Israel fails to produce fruits, at a period of grace given by God, then it will be cut off.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT **(March 16, 1980)**

First Reading: Joshua 5:9a. 10-12

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Gospel Reading: Luke 15:1-3. 11-32

First Reading: The passages narrate the circumcision of all the male Israelites born in the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt upon entering the Promised Land; then the first celebration of the Passover at Gilgal, under the leadership of Joshua.

Among the Israelites circumcision was a sign of the covenant made with Yahweh (Genesis 17:9-14; Exodus 12:43-48; Leviticus 12:3). The Passover was celebrated on the 14th day of that month, the month of Nisan which usually falls on March/April. When the Israelites left Egypt they celebrated the Passover. Now to show that their liberation-event was completed they celebrate the Passover now inside the Promised Land. From that time on, the "manna" which sustained them during their wanderings in the desert ceased to fall.

Second Reading: As a result of one's incorporation in Christ, "there is a new creation". There is a radical transformation because of Christ's redemptive activity. A new being is effected, essentially differing from what was before. Christ has become indeed the turning point in history. But this is all the work of God (v. 18). God is the source of man's reconciliation through Christ who in turn has entrusted this ministry of "handing on this reconciliation" to the Apostles. Because of the salvific work of Christ God reconciled the world to himself, "not holding men's faults against them" (v. 19). God now looks at the human race as if sin had not been committed (cf. Romans 5:18-21). This is called "objective redemption" by theologians. The apostles (and their successors) were entrusted with the task to spread the news that men are reconciled to God. They are God's ambassadors. Still the full effect of this reconciliation cannot be achieved unless men allow themselves to be reconciled, that is why the ministers or ambassadors of God continue their appeal: "be reconciled to God".

Gospel Reading: The Prodigal Son. We may distinguish two parts in this parable: 1) the central story of the younger son who left his father's house, lived a wanton life, became miserable after spending all his money, repented, and returned to his father; 2) the episode with the older brother which aims to enhance more the merciful and loving character of the father. In the central story we may distinguish three stages: 1) the sin of the son (vv. 11-13); 2) his conversion (14-20a); 3) the forgiveness of the father (20b-24).

Critics do not agree in the interpretation of the older brother. Do they represent the Pharisees or the just in general? The immediate context refers to the Scribes and Pharisees (v. 2). Perhaps, in the mind of St. Luke the image of the older brother has a more universal meaning, those people who consider themselves just, who sees the mote in others' eyes without seeing the beam in their own eyes. The father is God, the younger brother any sinner who repents, the older brother, the rest of men.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT (March 23, 1980)

First Reading: Isaiah 43:16-21

Second Reading: Philippians 3:8-14

Gospel Reading: John 8:1-11

First Reading: The following verses are considered to be the work of Deutero-Isaiah, a prophet who could have descended from the Isalan school or tradition living in Babylon during the time of the

exile. In this passage, the author describes the return of the exiles or the "new exodus". As the exodus from Egypt was a great manifestation of the power of Yahweh, so also in this "new exodus". Although the author recalls the salvific acts of Yahweh in the past still he reflects on these events not only for the sake of glorying in the past but applying them to the present. What is important are the present deeds of Yahweh showing His continuous protection of His people.

Second Reading "Supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (verse 8): The knowledge that Paul had of Christ after his conversion far surpassed any knowledge or experience that he had during his life as a Pharisee. As he wrote these passages about 20 years after his conversion he could only regard his former life before he knew Christ as rubbish or dung. Yet mere intellectual knowledge of Christ is not enough. St. Paul considers the communion with Christ as a goal. It grows and develops until its perfection at the parousia or Christ's second coming. He has still to run the race up to the finish "for the prize which God calls us upward to receive in Christ Jesus" (verse 14).

Gospel Reading: This episode of the adulterous woman is considered by biblical scholars not to be original in the Gospel of St. John. Many major manuscripts of St. John omit it. The Greek Fathers and commentators before the 12th century seemed not to know it, but it is well known among the Latin Fathers and found in the Vulgate. But there is no doubt as to its canonicity and inspiration as declared by the Council of Trent. The style of the story is very close to that of St. Luke and probably it was originally part of St. Luke's gospel and was transferred here to illustrate what our Lord said in John 8:15: "you judge by human standards; I judge no one, . . .

The narrative is in accordance with the pattern in the synoptics. Jesus' adversaries were trying to ensnare him with legalistic problems which for them seemed insoluble that whatever action our Lord would take would be for his own condemnation. Still Christ solves the dilemma with great wisdom and charity for the one accused.

PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION (March 30, 1980)

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7

Second Reading: Philippians 2:6-11

Gospel Reading: Luke 22:14-23:56 (or 23:1-49)

First Reading: The following passages from Isaiah comprise the first verses of the "Third song of the servant of Yahweh". The

first song starts from chapter 42 while the second one from chapter 49. In comparison with the two first songs, this third one is more somber and the persecution of the servant of God more violent. The Servant affirms that the word of Yahweh is source of salvation and he has been appointed as spokesman "given a disciple's tongue". He speaks of what he has heard and listened to like a disciple although he suffered insults and humiliations. It is not however clear whether the Prophet himself was the one persecuted or Israel, as a collectivity.

Second Reading: As part of his exhortation to the Philippians, Paul inserted this sublime hymn to Christ representing a very early kerygmatic confession of Christ's divine pre-existence and his condescension through his Incarnation and his humiliation to death on the Cross. He suffered death in obedience to his Father and because of this he received that heavenly exaltation and therefore all creation in the universe should adore him. Jesus by his death and resurrection was constituted the Lord (*Kyrios*), an allusion to Isaiah 45:23 transferring to the new *Kyrios*, Christ, the adoration given to Yahweh, or better Christ is thus esteemed equal to Yahweh and given equal adoration.

Gospel Reading: The Gospel reading in today's Mass is taken from the narrative of the Passion according to St. Luke. This is the longest section in the Gospel. One of the factors in the development of the passion narrative could have been the liturgy in which according to St. Paul the Christians "proclaimed the death of the Lord till he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). This is quite pronounced in St. Matthew whose account of the Passion is solemn adding details and biographical anecdotes like that of Judas, of Pilate and his wife. St. Luke on the other hand invites us to look at the Passion as part witness, part experience. He wants us to take a place next to Jesus, even carrying his cross like Simon of Cyrene. He wants us to see ourselves in the weakness of Peter as well as in the plea for forgiveness of the good thief.

HOMILIES FOR FEBRUARY

PETER THE PRIVILEGED APOSTLE AS VICAR OF CHRIST

Fifth Sunday of the year: February 3, 1980

1. **Situation:** In one midwestern town in the United States with a population of about 15,000 one can surprisingly find thirty-two non-Catholic churches. In each of these churches one can read the year

when that particular church or chapel was built. The year itself when each particular non-catholic denomination was founded and their founder may be traced back further.

We enter one of the Lutheran churches as there are three different Lutheran churches in this town. This church was founded by Martin Luther in 1517. Then we pass on to the Episcopalian church. This was founded by King Henry VIII of England in 1534. Just a little further we will reach the Presbyterian church founded in 1560 by John Knox. One block away is the Congregational church founded in 1583 by Robert Browne; next is the Baptist church with John Smith as founder in 1660; then the Methodist church started by John Wesley in 1729. The other denominations are less than 300 years old.

All of these sects separated from the Mother Church founded by our Lord Jesus Christ, visibly governed by the Apostolic College with the Holy Father, the successor of St. Peter as head. The present Apostolic College is composed by the bishops all over the world, successor of the Apostles.

2. Biblical Message. Sufficient evidence are found in the New Testament to show that Peter was the head of the apostolic group even during the earthly life of Jesus, and even after Christ's ascension into heaven.

In the list of the Apostles the name of Peter is always mentioned first (Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16); he was always a constant companion of Jesus wherever He went and witnessed all His miracles. He was privileged to witness both the glory and humiliation of Jesus together with John and James: the resurrection of Jairus' daughter; the transfiguration, and the agony in the garden. He was given more coverage and limelight in the gospels than any of Matthias to take the place of Judas. He acted as spokesman of the Apostles at Pentecost, and preached the sermon converting 3,000 people. The first one who baptized a pagan to Christianity was Peter in the person of the Centurion Cornelius and his household. He was the one who gave the decision at the Council of Jerusalem. Our list is not exhaustive and some more could be added, but this is enough to prove Peter's privileged position in the Church.

3. Our Response: The successor of Peter, the Holy Father in Rome, is presently the head of the Apostolic College, composed of the bishops who are successors of the Apostles. As Peter occupied a privileged position in the early Church, so today his successor, the Pope, continues that function. He was ordained to confirm the faith of the other Apostles and disciples which underwent a crisis during the passion. He himself sealed that faith with his blood.

HAPPY THE PERSECUTED

Sixth Sunday of the Year: February 10, 1980

1. Situation: About the year 100, St. Ignatius of Antioch, a direct disciple of St. John the Evangelist, was sentenced to die to be thrown into the amphitheater in the midst of wild beasts to be mangled by them. His friends in Rome wanted to ask for his release because of his age but he pleaded with them in a letter not to do such a thing. He in fact welcomed his martyrdom. He wrote to the Christians in Rome this moving letter:

"I am writing to all the Churches and state emphatically to all that I die willingly for God, providing you do not interfere. I beg you, do not show me unreasonable kindness. Suffer me to be the food of wild beasts, which are the means of my making my way to God. God's wheat I am, and by the teeth of wild beasts I am to be ground that I may be proven to be Christ's pure bread. Better still, coax the wild beasts to become my tomb and to leave no part of my person behind: once I have fallen asleep. I do not wish to be a burden to anyone. Then only shall I be a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ when the world will not even see my body. Petition Christ in my behalf that through these instruments I may prove God's sacrifice. . . Oh, may the beasts prepared for me be my joy! And I pray that they may be found to be ready for me. I will even coax them to make short work of me, not as has happened to some whom they were too timid to touch. And should they be unwilling to attack me who am willing, I will myself compel them. . . fire, cross, struggles with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, mangling of limbs, crunching of the whole body, cruel tortures inflicted by the devil — let them come upon me, provided only I make my way to Jesus Christ".

2. The Good News: Christian teaching considers a man happy in the midst of persecutions, hatred, abuses, false accusations, if such a man suffers all these things for the sake of Christ. Happiness, then, does not depend on any external contraptions like riches, affluence bodily comforts. Nevertheless, Christian teaching does not propagate that pain, suffering, persecution and the like are good in themselves and are to be endured for their own sake. This will be a kind of masochism. They become meritorious only if suffered "on account of the Son of Man", that is for the sake of Christ or of God.

3. Our Response: One time or another we will have to endure persecution, whether intentional or otherwise, whether falsely done or due to misinterpretations of facts or simply because our actions

do not conform with what the world, against the spirit of Christ, expects us to do. If this happens we are given the best of opportunities to suffer for Christ's sake. If we endure these persecutions with this kind of attitude, then, we will be happy. Otherwise, if we suffer persecution for other motives, we will only become more miserable.

PARDON OF ENEMIES

Seventh Sunday of the Year: February 17, 1960

1. **Situation:** This incident happened on the night of April 25, 1958 in Philadelphia. A gang of eleven young hoodlums mauled to death a young Korean student named In Ho Oh. They accosted him first asking for money so they could pay their way to a dance. As the Korean could not give them any they ganged up on him and beat him without mercy until he died.

This cruel murder angered the citizens of Philadelphia, more so because the victim was an innocent foreigner. They were expecting that the parents of the boy and the Korean authorities would demand the full prosecution of the killers and ask for an official apology or reparation for the crime committed. But instead the parents of In Ho Oh wrote to the Red Cross in Philadelphia the following letter:

"We deply appreciate the expressions of sympathy you have extended to us at this time. . . We are sad, not only because of In Ho's unachieved future but also because of the unsaved souls and the paralyzed human nature of the murderers. . . Our family has met together and we have decided to petition that the most generous treatment possible within the laws of your Government be given to those who committed this criminal action without knowing what it would mean to him who has been sacrificed, to his family, to his friends, and to his country. . . Our whole family has decided to save money to start a fund for the religious, educational, vocational, and social guidance of the boys when they are released."

2. **The Good News:** Contrary to worldly expectations and the seemingly natural attitude of men, Christ tells us to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us. He himself gave a supreme example of this love when he forgave his enemies from the cross. This attitude demands heroism in the eyes of th world but presented in the Gospel as the normal attitude of a Christian. Loving one's enemies does not mean condoning the evil which dominates in the

personality of the enemy but looking at the person of the enemy made to the image and likeness of God and redeemed by the blood of Christ.

3. Our Response: If you love your enemy you destroy the enemy in him as the evil enveloping him which was the cause why you considered him an enemy in the first place gradually dissolves in the presence of the heat rays of love. Love let the good blossom in your enemy until finally his inimical character will just shed off or melt away and you will see again the redeemed image of God emerge.

DECEIT: TEMPTATIONS STRATEGY

First Sunday in Lent: February 24, 1980

1. Situation: In his work the "Pilgrim's Progress" John Bunyan tells the story in an allegory how the city called Mansoul was captured by the enemy. The city was built by a wise and good king, well protected and its citizens enjoying all the peace and prosperity inside its walls. No army of the enemy could break down the powerful walls nor penetrate its five gates. These gates have names called Eargate, Eyegate, Nosegate, Mouthgate, and Feelgate.

There was a wicked giant called Devil who wanted very much to capture the city. He gathered his councilors to plan how to conquer the city but all plans seemed to be worthless. The city is simply well protected for any attacking army. Then the Devil had an idea that might possibly work. He would try to conquer Mansoul by deceit. He would make the citizens of the city and the authorities believe that they are friends. They conceived of a strategy to flatter the people, tell them lies, make false promises to them. In this manner they will be able to penetrate inside the city.

And so the Devil started the execution of his plan. He went to Eargate and very politely requested for an audience with Captain Resistance and Judge Conscience who were commanding the defense. In flattery words and lies he convince them that he was a friend. He started to subvert the reputation of the king saying that they are being exploited for his own selfish interest.

The people were convinced of these lies. Little by little they opened Eargate and Eyegate to the enemy. They entered the city and once they were in other attacks followed until Mansoul was conquered by the enemies.

2. The Good News: Jesus was tempted by Satan and our Lord came out victorious. He did not exempt himself from the assault of his adversary to teach us to be on guard always against temptations, to unmask the deceitful strategy of the devil and to show us how to do battle against the evil one on his own terms. The devil used Scripture cunningly and deceptively to tempt Jesus and our Lord used the same Scripture to topple the devil down.

3. Our Response: As our Lord was tempted, we his disciples will not expect to be treated otherwise. But we have already a blueprint of the forms by which these temptations will come and the strategy used by the father of lies. To rely, however, solely on our own powers to combat these temptations would be a fatal mistake. It is true that we will never be tempted beyond our endurance but still to conquer these temptations special strength is required which could only come from our incorporation with Christ. As he conquered all temptations, we his followers, can undoubtedly do so, but only if we remain united with him.

REPENTANCE NOT TO BE DELAYED

Third Sunday of Lent: March 9, 1980

1. Situation: In one of the movies a scene was depicted where the actor, pursued by his enemies, suddenly came near a river which was fast rising up. He tried many times to cross but whenever the water reaches up to his neck he recedes back afraid of being swept away. But then the water continue to rise and his pursuers were fast catching up with him. There was no time to lose, the longer he waited the more dangerous it would become and more difficult for him to cross. Realizing his serious situation he made the plunge before it was too late. He swam safely although with much difficulty to the other bank.

This is exactly the condition of sinners who delay their repentance. They think of the present difficulties. But the longer they delay the more difficult it will become for them to make the plunge and repent of their sins. Their hearts become more hardened. Do not delay because sooner or later it may be too late.

2. The Good News: God is so merciful to give us the opportunity to repent, but his justice requires that this should be done in a certain period of time. Life is already too short even for the second

best, so we have always to strive for the "first best". Yet for some people life is even too short for their call to repentance. They dilly-dally until it is too late. What if accidents happen like what happened to those men who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell? What if they die in a war, an ambush, a hi-jacking?

3. Our Response: Since we cannot control the passage of time we should never let any time pass being separated from God. If ever we have the misfortune to be separated from him, let us do all the means in our power, and the means for this are not wanting, to reconcile ourselves with God. We may not have the opportunity to grab heaven at the last hour as the good thief had done, we may not reach the ripe old age that we expect so as to wantonly spend our youth as we please. We may not wake up tomorrow as we close our eyes tonight. So the best strategy to defeat these uncertainties of life is always to be with God.

SINS COUNTLESS AS SANDS OF THE SEA STILL FORGIVEN

Fourth Sunday in Lent: March 16, 1980

1. Situation: A story was told by a missionary working in one of the islands in the Pacific. One day a woman entered the sacristy while he was about to say Mass carrying a handful of sand.

"Father, do you see what I have?" she asked.

"Why, sure, that is a handful of sand," answered the good-natured priest. "What are you going to do with it?"

"I look at these sands as my sins," the woman explained. They are numerous and countless. How can God ever forgive me for committing them?"

"Look," said the missionary, "go back to the seashore where you got that sand and place them near the waves. Then you observe as the wave comes. What will happen? It will wash away completely that pile of sand. That is the way God forgives our sins. His mercy is wider than the ocean since he is infinitely merciful. If you are truly sorry for all your sins and go to confession to reconcile yourself with God, your sins, however great will be forgiven with God.

2. The Good News: However much we have sinned against our loving Father He is always ready waiting for us to return. The Gospel passage highlights the different stages of the Prodigal son's

conversion: the realization of his miserable state, the peace and prosperity he was enjoying in his father's household, the loving treatment of his own father; after that realization, he resolved to return preparing what he was going to confess to his father, disposed to receive whatever punishment will be imposed on him even to the point of not being recognized as the son and member of the family but only one of the servants; the actualization of his resolution by starting for home and seeing his father meet him with great happiness.

3. Our Response: Sinners who do not realize their miserable state being in sin are difficult to be converted. We can only hope and pray that an external cause, perhaps a calamity, like that famine in the prodigal son's story, would happen and let them come to their senses. Some people have gone back to God after a traumatic experience or a crisis in their lives: an accident, a serious illness, personal problems and the like. But will that opportunity ever come?

PARDON WITHOUT VIOLATING JUSTICE

Fifth Sunday in Lent: March 23, 1980

1. Situation: During the civil war in the United States, a soldier was court-martialed for a serious offense and was sentenced to be shot. His old father came all the way to Washington to beg President Lincoln to save his son's life since he was his only son. Lincoln took pity on the plight of the old man but felt helpless. One of his generals, General Butler had already criticized him for interfering with the affairs of the army and without their loyalty and support the war would be a lost cause. In fact he just received a message from Butler that day which he handed over to be read by the father. "Mr. President," it goes, "I beg you not to interfere with the court-martials of the army. You will destroy all discipline."

The man could not hold back his tears at the prospect of seeing his son put to death. This greatly touched the heart of the President. He got a piece of paper and wrote this order: "John Smith is not to be shot until further orders from me. Signed: Abraham Lincoln." He gave it to the man who was still disappointed at the message thinking that the President was writing the bill of pardon for his son. What if he orders him to be shot any day? But Lincoln assured him that since the order would come from him that order would never come.

2. **The Good News:** In the gospel story a sinful yet pitiful woman was being judged by human standards demanding that divine standards conform to its dictates. But divine standard has its own norms to follow totally different from the human. In the divine standard justice is tempered with mercy, hypocritical accusations are foiled by truth, and the guilty is given all the chances to repent. Granted that the woman was guilty of the crime, still to be judged those who perhaps may have been guilty of a greater crime than that committed by her cannot be tolerated by the divine standard. The only one allowed to cast the stone of death on her was the one who had not committed any sin. But no one among those accusing could conform to this divine standard and not stone was ever cast.

3. **Our Response:** Those of us who are prone to judge or criticize others or our neighbours should first see whether we are worthy to cast that stone of judgment or whether we are more guilty than they. Even in cases when we are sure of the guilt of our neighbor we are never allowed to take the law into our own hand's and still should presume the person to be innocent until proven guilty by competent authorities or competent courts of law. At any rate we can always conform to the divine standard of justice which is clothed by mercy and love, wishing the guilty to repent and be again reconciled with God.