

FRIDAY – FOURTH WEEK OF LENT – 24 MARCH 2023

Wisdom 2: 1a, 12 – 22; Psalm 34: 17 – 18 – 21; John 7: 1 – 2, 25 – 30

Saint of the Day: Saint Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez, (born August 15, 1917, Ciudad Barrios, El Salvador—died March 24, 1980, San Salvador; beatified May 23, 2015; canonized October 14, 2018; feast day March 24), Salvadoran Roman Catholic archbishop who was a vocal critic of the violent activities of government armed forces, right-wing groups, and leftist guerrillas involved in El Salvador's civil conflict. On 24th March 1980 he was suddenly shot dead while celebrating mass in the chapel of the hospital where he lived.

Reflection:

The Lenten journey is entering its last phase, the Passion of the Lord is knocking at the door. The first reading from the Book of Wisdom is prefiguring the Suffering Servant of the Lord, who is the righteous man, 'the sign of contradiction' who "**is inconvenient**" to the world. The forces of the world, "**lie in wait**" conspiring against him because he "**opposes**" their action. This is the experience of everyone who dares to challenge the status quo. The one who dares to stand with the poor and the voiceless. The Responsorial Psalm echoes the reality of the God of the oppressed, "**The Lord is close to the broken-hearted; those whose spirit is crushed he will save.**"

In the Gospel of John, Jesus had to be careful about entering Jerusalem in Judea because of the fear of the Jews. They wanted to kill Jesus because he was a one man band who was determined to speak truth to religious and political powers. Jesus was not afraid to challenge those who were using their positions of service for their own gain. The level of disruption that Jesus caused threatened private interests and changed the religious and the political narrative of his people hence they had to get him out of the way. The brave Bishop of El Salvador, Saint Oscar Romero was once a timid cleric who was towing the line until he came to realise that the Gospel of Christ was not about being comfortable in your situation but speaking truth to power. He was brutally removed by his government.

THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD – 25 MARCH 2023

Isaiah 7: 10 – 14; 8: 10; Psalm 40: 7 – 8a, 8b – 9, 10, 11; Hebrews 10: 4 – 10

Gospel of the Day: Luke 1: 26 – 38

The Holy Word of God today speaks of two pregnant young women who became part of God's greatest plan for the salvation of the world thus these virgins were part of the brightest future for the People of God.

In the first reading, the prophecy of Isaiah to Ahaz the king, predicted a pregnant young woman as a sign that God is with His people. Even when all seems lost, putting our trust in the Lord is better than putting our trust in the great human powers of our times. The Lord will never abandon his people, He will always raise them up. Mary accepted the Word made flesh and was filled with the Holy Spirit. She said yes to the power of God. Mary the Virgin of Nazareth opened herself to God, "**Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word.**"

St Augustine spoke of Mary's womb as the bridal chamber in which the Word and the flesh, the divine and the human natures of Christ, are united. Mary the ancient and ever young beauty of God leads the whole choir of creation in singing praises to God, "**See, I have come, Lord, to do your will.**" Saint John Paul II, the Pope of happy memory reminded us that 'The Mother of the Redeemer has a precise place in the plan of salvation.' Mary points us to Christ who "abolishes the first in order to establish the second" according to the Letter to the Hebrews. In the second order therefore, Mary from the beginning is part of God's plan, she is "full of grace" and the Lord is with her. She has found favour with God.

Our participation in the plan of salvation is best served by our devotion to the Handmaid of the Lord. She is the Model of how to best give of ourselves to God. In the history of the Church, we have turned to her as our Mother, because she the indeed the Mother of our Redeemer and God, Jesus Christ.

Associating with Mary leads us to new life even if we have lived with barrenness for the most our lives. Mary's kinswoman Elizabeth because of the power of God was given life in her old age. As the angel summarised it, "**For with God nothing will be impossible.**"

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT – YEAR A – 26 MARCH 2023

Ezekiel 37: 2 – 14; Psalm 130: 1 – 2, 3 – 4, 5 – 7a, 7b – 8; Romans 8: 8 – 11;
Gospel of the Day: John 11: 1 – 45

Reflection

In the Profession of Faith, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, we say, **“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophet.”**

This life of God, the Holy Spirit, has always been given to us. In the beginning of creation, it is this life of God that has breathed into the human being. It is this life that gives the human being the dignity of the being a child of God. In the book of the prophet Ezekiel, the experience of death that is part of the sin of Israel will not be the final destiny for those who are children of God.

The Lord God of Israel, says to all who are experiencing spiritual, emotional and physical death, **“Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my People; and I will bring you home into the land of Israel.”** The land of Israel is the promised land of the spirit, where we will no longer belong to the flesh. St Paul writing to the Romans, assures us that as Christians, **“But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you.”**

This life of the Spirit, is the life of faith that Martha and Mary revealed when the Lord Jesus came to visit them after the death of his beloved friend Lazarus of Bethany. Martha the woman of active goes out to meet Jesus to profess her faith in him, **“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.”** When faced with the crisis of spiritual, emotional and physical death, it is the faith of Martha that we need because encountering Jesus will bring life, he will call out our names together with the name of Lazarus, and say, **“.... Come... Unbid him, and let him go.”**

MONDAY – FIFTH WEEK OF LENT – 27 MARCH 2023

Daniel 13: 1 – 9, 15 – 17, 19 – 30, 33 – 62; Psalm 23: 1 – 3a, 3b – 4, 5; John 8: 1- 11

Reflection

The story of the beautiful Susanna, the daughter of Hilkiah, and wife of Joakim in the Book of the Prophet Daniel can be read as contemporary parable of women abuse in a patriarchal society. It is a modern story of women being taken advantage of by unscrupulous men, for example, human traffic of women who will later made into sex slaves in brothels of the world. It examines the use of male power and privilege to subjugate women sexually. But this is also a story of salvation, a story of the possibility that these treacherous situations can be save by men of integrity who do no play the patriarchal game of abuse and victimisation.

The system of oppressing women in a patriarchal society is exposed by Jesus in the gospel, where the woman who was supposedly caught in the very act of adultery is forgiven. A scene that St Augustine aptly described as Misery encountering Mercy. A valid question can be asked as to where was the man who was committing adultery with the woman? Why is it that men are excused while woman are condemned in these matters.

Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the shaming of woman without considering the whole story. Our society is still very much patriarchal, men tend to shame the woman who stands up to them. Men in our society have a tendency of shutting up women in order to hide their inadequacies. Women are generally on the side of men because that is convenient for them to shame a strong and powerful woman. These power dynamics in a patriarchal society need a change of heart, an honest assessment of our own motives. If we are not part of the solution, then we are part of the problem. The power dynamics will not change in society if there is no radical rethinking of the status quo. Jesus is calling for integrity that goes beyond the protection of self-interest and protection of patriarchal privilege.