

3rd Sunday of Lent

The story is told of a priest who was coming back to his Rectory one evening in the dark only to be accosted by a robber who pulled a gun at him and demanded, "Your money or your life!"

As the priest reached his hand into his coat pocket the robber saw his Roman collar and said, "So you are a priest? Then you can go." The priest was rather surprised at this unexpected show of piety and so tried to reciprocate by offering the robber his packet of cigarettes, to which the robber replied, "No, Father, I don't smoke during Lent."

Suppose we just ask one question about each of our readings today. In the first one: why are we still being warned about idols? We are not pagans, we are all baptized Christians.

In our second reading: how is it possible to speak of "God's folly" and "God's weakness"? It seems absurd, when wisdom and power are God's attributes, not weakness.

And then in the gospel: Are not Jesus' words about tearing down the temple and in three days raising it up, a clear prediction of his death and resurrection, proof that he had divine foreknowledge?

As to the first question, the scripture gives the answer when it says, "you shall not have other gods besides me." For us, an idol is not likely to be a carved statue. It can be anything we appreciate, or admire, or value more than we value God.

The pursuit of power can become idolatrous, especially in the world of business. The love of sports can become idolatrous, just look at how we idolize athletes.

The love of money, and the commitment to make a lot of it at the expense of family, worship, and health, seems to be the most likely idol in these days.

We chant USA, USA, in essence making the claim, right or wrong, USA! But, when a nation is wrong, when a government confronts us with laws and procedures and policies contrary to God's laws or our conscience, we are not bound to obey, much less to boast about our patriotism.

The recent actions of our government to pass legislation requiring religious institutions to provide birth control in its health care plan, is an example of something we are bound NOT to obey and even fight against.

We have a duty to prove it wrong. The making of idols? It goes on all the time. Sometimes we make ourselves, our lifestyle, the idol we worship.

As for the second question, “how is it possible to speak of God’s folly and weakness?” St. Paul, obviously answers this question using a very human way to speak about God. After all, we have no other language except our human speech.

But he could have just as well said that we don't even begin to understand the mind of God, the depths of the divine wisdom and knowledge.

Jesus, coming among us as a man, the Incarnation, is the wisdom of God. Jesus, both human and divine.

Think what it would be like if we could only talk about God the way theologians do! Consubstantial, transubstantiation, omnipotent. Thank God we can talk about Jesus and read about Him and get some idea of what God's love is like. Because God **IS** love.

Knowing the story of Jesus, it is easy to see the wisdom of the incarnation in helping us to believe. The poor have an advocate because He was a poor man. Working people also, because He was a working man. So do physicians, and teachers, because he was a healer and a teacher.

Everyone really has an advocate in Jesus, and is close to Him, because He was human. He learned his letters, as any child does (and Hebrew is not an easy language to learn).

He prayed. He took long walks. He enjoyed food and friends, and parties. He also knew pain and suffering and even dying, as all mortals do.

But Jesus' weakness as a human -- the fact that he would die -- also became the occasion for God to raise up his Son from the grave.

We do preach Christ crucified, but also risen, and victorious. To stress that He is crucified is a reminder, not that he paid some price for us, but that his ugly death resulted because of human sin, our sin.

And what about the final question: do not Jesus' words about destroying this temple and in three days I will raise it up, clearly indicate that he knew with divine foreknowledge what would happen to him, both his death and resurrection?

Well, it does read that way but you see, it was written long after He had been raised; this is the resurrection faith of His disciples. As for the references to the temple, the evangelist John has a special purpose here as well.

He wanted to show that worship in spirit and truth transcended the old sacrifices of the temple. This kind of worship is carried out everyday by members of Jesus' body.

It is indeed why we are here today and sharing with our brothers and sisters our faith, our hope and our love. God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might have eternal life.

We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to many, but to those who are called, the wisdom of God. AMEN.