

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Sunday's Readings: Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 9:28-36

This week's scripture seems to be a call to action. It challenges listeners to be open and to act upon God's Word. Abraham hears God speak of a covenant. This agreement is sealed by giving of land: a possession. Not only does God promise a certain "chosenness" for Abraham's descendants, he also enforces this in the land — a special place in which to pitch one's tent.

The apostles witnessing the Transfiguration stand on new land as they view the wonder of Jesus transfigured before them. Is it possible that they do not see the wonder of Jesus' true nature? Isn't there more to their experience of Jesus than meets the eye?

St. Paul indicates, in the second reading, the dangers of forgetting: "I am talking about those who are set upon the things of this world. As you will know, we have our citizenship in heaven..." We must reconcile ourselves to the fact that we are dreamers. Our dreams involve this world, but transport us to the next.

Perhaps this week is a good

time to focus on personal priorities. If we dealt with the need to be reconciled with the community last week, we can zero in on the constancy of our life... the centerpoint that gives our lives balance. This is Jesus. We must make it a point of courage to discover what our needs are to be. Have we become too self-oriented? Have we lost a true sense of the gospel message? Or have we perhaps watered it down? Can you still call yourself a visionary, able to see the transfiguring power of God's love?

The challenge of this second week of Lent seems to be private and individual, while at the same time applying itself deeply to the communal. There is a need to reconcile Christian values with societal values. Societal values tend to limit a person, trying to control the dream dimension of human life. We become victims of the media, our peers, what others say... Christian values allow us flexibility, a vision, an experience that there is more than meets the eye. Reconciliation of these two value systems is a lifelong process.



CROSSROADS IV



Along the Way

Bishop Matthew H. Clark

The years are passing by very quickly. That fact grabbed my attention this week as it never has in the past.

It's not as though I have not been conscious of aging before. The gradual emergence of physical clues brings that awareness. For example, I know that I tend to retire earlier in the evening and rise earlier in the morning. I get up almost every night and it is not because I forgot to put out the cat. I notice a lengthening interval between the broding of my brain and the response of brother body. I see the near half of the world with one eye, the distant half with the other, and a hazy combination of the two with both.

I could add considerably to the above list, and if you are at least 35 and counting, you probably can compose a similar one. If you can't, I suggest you call the nearest medical research center and/or news wire service. Both, I am sure, will judge you a hot property.

It is not just physical signs that indicate that life is moving on and which remind me that, finally, all of our years are numbered. There is another dimension to the experience which is much harder to articulate.

Let me express it in its simplest form by saying that I have never felt more alive, more excited about ministry or more at one with you in the journey of faith that joins us as sisters and brothers at the deepest levels of our being. In short, I have never been happier in my life.

This happiness certainly isn't the fruit of a carefree existence. In truth, I don't think I've ever felt more challenged by the demands of life and ministry than I do now. Nor have I ever experienced a time when there was as wide a gap as

there is now between those demands and my capacity to meet them.

My best explanation for my happiness lies in some mixture of a number of recent insights and experiences. Let me name some of them for you without attempting (because I am not sure I am able!) to explain them thoroughly or to relate them to one another:

1) I have a growing and deeply felt awareness that I am one with you in an effort of loving and faithful community. When I forget that or when I don't live the conviction, I can easily become exhausted and scattered.

2) I appreciate the love of friends more than I ever have. In particular, I find it a great and strengthening grace when I can share with friends what my life is all about and discover that they are ready to walk with me no matter what. Among those friends I count you who are kind enough to read these words.

3) Never have I been more confident of the dynamic, loving Spirit of God giving life to the Church and leading us to a deeper understanding of who we are and where we need to go.

To three groups I offer thanks for the joy of their company in recent days and for leading me to think about aging and maturing in a way that I have found very helpful. They are the women and men of St. Ann's Home/The Heritage, with whom I recently shared the grace of the Eucharist; three dear friends aged 75 and above and two others of my age with whom I enjoyed a remarkable happy social evening; and Sister Ann Maloy and her colleagues who offered to us all such a splendid report on the aging. - Peace to all.

Pope quotes Indian leaders speaking on sensitive issues

By NC News Service

Pope John Paul II addressed the controversial issues of birth control and evangelization when he visited India Feb. 1-10, but he used the words of Indian leaders when he spoke.

When speaking of birth control, he quoted Mahatma Gandhi, the late Hindu philosopher and activist known as the "father of the country." Speaking of evangelization, he quoted the Indian constitution's guarantee of "the right to profess, practice and propagate religion."

During the 14-city journey, which took the pope from remote northeastern India to the strongly Catholic regions of the southern coast, the pope spoke of the need for religious dialogue with non-Christians and unity among Christians. He also went into the heart of Calcutta's slums and prayed for the dead and dying in a charity house run by Mother Teresa.

India's 746 million people form one-seventh of the world's population. Although the annual growth rate has dropped to less than 2 percent, at the current rate India would have a population of nearly 1 billion by the year 2000.

The government estimates that between 35 and 40 percent of Indians use some contraceptive birth control or have been sterilized. The nation's Catholics — less than 2 percent of the population — have been urged by Church leaders to use natural family

planning. "Moral results can only be produced by moral restraints," Pope John Paul said Feb. 9, quoting Gandhi's writings to about 200,000 people gathered for a Mass at Bombay's Shivaji Park. "This, dear brothers and sisters, is the Church's profound conviction."

Although the pope did not mention the government's promotion of abortion, he told the crowd that families must "proclaim that all human life is sacred from the moment of conception."

Meeting in Madras with 250 representatives of various religions, including Hindus, Moslems and Sikhs, the pope pledged a dialogue based on "friendship" and "interior persuasion," then turned to the issue of spreading the faith.

Referring to the religious freedoms guaranteed in the constitution, he called on all Indians to "support this precious principle."

The pope said the Catholic Church's idea of religious freedom precludes "coercion on the part of individuals or social groups or any human power." No one, he said, should be forced to act against his convictions or be prevented from acting in accordance with them.

Hindus, who form a large majority in India, do not evangelize, and some have been resentful of Christians who do. In recent years, three Indian states have adopted "anti-conversion" laws which strictly limit active evangelization.

The pope's visit had been contested by small groups of extremist Hindus who said the visit would result in numerous conversions.

About 300 protestors were arrested a few miles from New Delhi's airport during the welcoming ceremony for the pope Feb. 1. One group burned an effigy of the pope.

Although the crowds were small in New Delhi — which has about 37,000 Catholics among its 5.7 million population — they increased as the trip progressed.

Tens of thousands of people packed Calcutta's old quarter Feb. 3 as the pope visited Nirmal Hriday, the two-room center run by Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity.

Many of the 44 women and 42 men touched by the pope were unable to rise from their mattresses on the floor. The pope, accompanied by Mother Teresa, walked slowly through the house, stopping to hand plates of sweet curd to each of the suffering.

Many of them cried as they touched his hands, and one woman shouted in Bengali, "I am alone, I am alone — come back again."

A Vatican spokesman said Mother Teresa, who sees such things every day, was able to smile throughout the visit, but when she asked the pope a question at one point, he

was too emotionally caught up to reply.

Outside the house, the pope told the crowd that the center was a place of "anguish and pain," but also "a house built of courage and faith."

Later that day, about 400,000 people gathered in Ranchi to hear the pope appeal for just wages and working conditions. Many who heard the pope were tribe members who work in the area's coal mines and steel plants.

"No one should be used as a mere instrument for production, as though the person were a machine or a beast of burden," the pope said. "The Church rejects any social or economic system that leads to the depersonalization of workers."

He said the Church insists on a wage high enough to support a worker's family and made a special plea for those unemployed because of "discrimination based on religion, caste, community or language." It was the first time the pope had referred explicitly to India's now-illegal caste system, which has kept millions of people in poverty for generations.

In the southern state of Kerala, where St. Thomas the apostle is believed to have landed in 52 A.D., the pope said the Church wanted to restore unity "where it has been weakened or tarnished."

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