

Cindy Bassett

The Bible Corner



Balaam, the forgotten prophet Part II

The same day that the wise man, Balaam, took the Lord's advice and refused to curse the Israelites who had recently camped out on the plains of Moab, King Balak sent special ambassadors to speak to Balaam again.

"Let me be sure that I understand this most kind offer," Balaam said a second time. "The king now agrees to pay any fee I desire, if I will curse the Hebrews."

"Not only that," one of the ambassadors added, "King Balak will bestow great honors on your name. You will be famous in all of the land as the man who saved his kingdom."

This time, God said, "Go with these men." And Balaam was very happy, because he thought he had changed God's mind.

What Balaam didn't know was that God was so angry with him, that he sent an angel to kill him en route to Midian. Off he went the next day, on his donkey, eager to receive his great honors.

As they neared the city, an angel stood in the middle of the road with sword drawn, prepared to slay Balaam for his foolishness. Balaam could not see this angel, but his donkey did, and bolted off the road. So Balaam beat the poor animal until she got back on the road. But when the donkey saw the angel again a short time later, she lay down and refused to move. Balaam was very angry that his donkey delayed his journey to claim his prize.

Just then, when Balaam saw the angel, he understood. "I have sinned against God. All of that money blinded me to the right purposes of God. I must go back home now."

"No," the angel advised, "the Lord wants you to go and see King Balak. There you will say only what God commands you."

When Balaam arrived, King Balak took him to the top of a mountain. "See," he said, pointing to the plain below, "there are those people who are hateful in my sight. I want them destroyed."

"Prepare seven altars with seven sacrifices," Balaam instructed. "Stand by

your offerings while I go and pray to the Lord."

A short time later, Balaam returned, saying, "Yes, King Balak, I have a message for you from God. These people are special in His sight. I can never denounce them, for the Lord will protect them forever."

"What?" King Balak cried. "I bring you here to curse the Hebrews, and you intend to bless them instead!"

"I can only do as the Lord has commanded," Balaam replied, turning to leave.

"Wait!" the king urged him. "Please, let us go to a different part of the mountain, where we will be able to see just a few of the Hebrews. Ask your God if you may curse only them."

When King Balak saw Balaam returning, he ran to meet him. "Well, what did God say this time? Did He agree?"

"God is not like humans who change their minds like the wind changing directions. Forever unto all generations it will be said: what wonders God has done for the people He loves!"

King Balak frantically argued, "If you cannot curse these people, at least don't bless them!"

"God has opened my eyes concerning the Hebrews," Balaam replied. "Blessed is anyone who blesses them, and let a curse fall on everyone who tries to curse them."

King Balak's country was defeated by the Hebrews. Balaam had tried to use his gifts for evil. He was never heard from again.

For further reading:

The story of Balaam is found in the Old Testament in Numbers, Chapter 22-24.

Meditation for Lent:

Dear Jesus, transform my stumbling block of selfishness into a steppingstone of generosity so I can use the gifts You have given me to serve others.

St. Bernard's Institute slates lectureship on spirituality

St. Bernard's Institute will present its 13th annual Otto A. Shults Lectureship on spirituality on Thursday, April 2, at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. Dolores Leckey, executive director of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Laity, will be the presenter.

The two lectures, entitled "The Experience of God in Everyday Life" and "Sabbath Time: The Other Side of Work and Ministry," will be held in the Strong Auditorium of Colgate Rochester Divinity School, 1100 S. Goodman St., Rochester.

Both lectures are free of charge.

Daffodil Festival scheduled

The Daffodil Festival is scheduled for March 30 to April 5 in Rochester. Sponsored by the American Cancer Society, the annual Daffodil Festival will bring the first flowers of spring to the Rochester area, and will give people the chance to support cancer-control activities sponsored by the American Cancer Society.

To order flowers, call the society at (716)288-1950, or look for volunteers at Rochester-area malls and shopping plazas on April 3 and 4.

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A Word for Sunday



Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 9:1-41; (R1) 1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13; (R2) Ephesians 5:8-14.

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. The disciples asked, "Who had sinned against this man or his parents that he should be born blind?"

The question is very interesting, in view of the blight of abortion that has hit our nation. They had asked, "Who had sinned — this man or his parents?" The man had been born blind; if he had sinned, it had to be pre-natal sin — sin in the womb.

Many Jews in our Lord's day believed such sin was possible. In fact, when the Pharisees cast the man out of the synagogue, they shouted at him, "You are steeped in sin from your birth, and you are giving us lectures?"

The point is this: sin clings only to people. If one could sin in the womb, as many Jews believed, then such a one was a person. But our intelligencia legalized abortions on the ground that a child in the womb is not a child but a fetus. Such people are blinder than the blind man.

The alternative for explaining the blind man's affliction was parental sin — a cornerstone of the Old Testament. Bathsheba's son died because of David's sin. Television repeatedly warns that parental drug addiction and alcoholism can hurt one's children.

Jesus, however, passed over the connection of sin and suffering and said that affliction is only an opportunity for God to show His power and compassion.

St. John devotes little space to the cure of the blind man, for the simple reason that he is more concerned with the interrogations that follow the cure. These interrogations were a masterful apologetics, in John's day, for the public ministry of Jesus and the persecution of Jewish Christians being thrown out of the synagogues around 90 A.D., like the blind man.

Our Lord used spittle for the cure. We might think that repulsive and unhygienic. But in Jesus' day, spittle was supposed to have curative powers. When we burn a finger, isn't our first instinct to put it into our mouth? Jesus was a wise physician. He used the methods His patients expected in order to win their confidence.

Lent is a time for preparing catechumens for baptism. So this gospel was chosen, because the cure incident is loaded with baptismal innuendos: (1) the man is blind from birth: baptism is a rebirth; (2) his eyes were "anointed" with mud: baptism is a christening; (3) he washed:

baptism is a washing; (4) the pool of Siloam means "sent": Jesus is the one sent, who sends the apostles to baptize; (5) blindness is removed: baptism removes the blindness of sin; (6) the man sees: baptism is the sacrament of enlightenment, giving the light of faith.

Following the cure, the blind man was confronted first by his neighbors and then by the Pharisees. It is amusing to contrast the naive and simple honesty of the blind man and his parents with the intense dishonesty of the Pharisees, who struggled absurdly to overturn the irrefutable evidence of the miracle. The last refuge of a scoundrel in argumentation is the *argumentum ad hominem*: to shift from the issue and attack the person, as the Pharisees did. They abused the man, insulted him, threatened him and finally expelled him from the synagogue.

When Jesus heard of his expulsion, He sought out the blind man and rewarded his loyalty, honesty and sincerity with the light of faith.

The blind man is one of the most attractive figures in the gospels. He was a brave man, for he stood up to the Pharisees. His questions were so simple and obvious that they seem as sensational as those of the child in Andersen's fairy tale, asking why the emperor doesn't have any clothes on. Jesus blessed such honesty and artlessness.

To justify His work, Jesus had said, "We must do the deeds of God while it is day." We identifies us with Jesus. Day is our lifetime: night is death. When night comes, few of us work.

There is a fable about three apprentice devils who talked to Satan about their plans to tempt and to ruin men.

The first said, "I will tell men there is no God."

Satan said, "That won't delude many. Men know there is a God."

The second said, "I will tell men that there is no hell."

Satan answered, "That'll deceive no one; men know even now that there is a hell for sin."

The third said, "I will tell men that there is no hurry."

"Ah," said Satan, "go; that will ruin men by the thousands."

One of the greatest follies of man is procrastination: putting off until tomorrow what can be done today. His most dangerous delusion is to think there is plenty of time, that there is a tomorrow. There are things that cannot be put off, for no man knows if, for him, tomorrow will ever come.

Therefore, "we must do the deeds of Him who sent me while it is day."

Alzheimer's seminar offered for nurses, social workers, others

"Understanding Alzheimer's and Other Dementias: Implications for Nursing Care," a day-long program designed for LPNs, RNs, nursing students and social workers, will be offered at the Community College of the Finger Lakes (CCFL) on Saturday, March 28.

Sponsored by the college's department of nursing, the workshop will discuss the causes of the disease, the issues surrounding it, and appropriate treatment techniques.

Weekend of activities planned for Finger Lakes D/S/W group

People who are separated, divorced or widowed are invited to attend a special weekend led by Tom Kenny of Geneva, a member of the Finger Lakes Separated, Divorced and Widowed group.

The program, which will feature a pot-luck supper, hiking, board games, sing-a-longs and a chance to meet new friends, is

scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, March 28-29, at Jack Reef Hostel near Baldwinsville.

For information or registration, call Kenny at (315)781-0897; Joan at (315)497-3006; Marge, (315)834-9775; Sue, (716)394-7977; or Carl at the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry at (315)789-2686.

Cenacle Center slates weekend retreat for Christian singles

"Expanding Your Boundaries of Prayer," a retreat for never-married Christian singles between the ages of 21 and 40, is scheduled for the Cenacle Center, 693 East Ave., Rochester, from April 24 to April 26. The retreat will be given by Sister Helen Harber, Sister Barbara Kingston and Sister Florence Pfeiffer, r.c., with Father Francis Blighton

celebrating the Eucharistic liturgy. The offering for the retreat, which will begin at 7:30 p.m. on April 24 and end at 3 p.m. on April 27, is \$60.

For reservations and information, contact the Cenacle Ministry Office, 693 East Ave., Rochester, or call (716)271-8755.

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