



Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time B

June 10, 2018

REFLECTIONS ON TODAY'S READINGS

- **Adam, where are you? Hiding from God?**
- **Courage in time of trial**
- **Struggling with a divided heart?**
- **Choosing loyalty to God over family**

In today's first reading, (Gen 3:9-15), Adam encounters God after falling from grace. Reflecting on this scene, Fr. Flor McCarthy writes:

When God gave Adam and Eve the gift of free will, he gave them the capacity to be moral, that is, to choose to do what is right. But they chose evil. To choose evil is to abuse freedom. And like children who have done wrong, they tried to hide rather than face the consequences. But God came looking for them and called out to Adam, "Where are you?"

But there seems to be a problem here. If God knows all things, why did he have to ask Adam, "Where are you?" Are we to conclude that God didn't know where Adam was? Oh, God knew all right. It was Adam who didn't know. In asking the question, God does not expect to learn something he doesn't know. What he wants is to produce an effect on the person which can only be produced by just such a question.

The question "Where are you?" is a profoundly disturbing question. And it is a question which is addressed not just to Adam but also to every person. In every ear, God calls to every person in sin, and says: "Where are you in your relationship to me, to other, and to yourself?"

Adam hid to avoid rendering an account, and to escape responsibility for what he had done. We hide for the same reason, when we find ourselves in Adam's situation. When we do wrong, we try to hide from the consequences. In trying to hide from God (which is impossible), we are hiding from ourselves too.

But there is Someone who seeks us out. We hear the voice of God in our heart asking: "Where are you?" God is not indifferent. God pursues us when we would rather not deal with him. He does so, not to punish us, but to get us to face up to what we have done. He loves us enough to forgive our sins, but he wants us to take responsibility for them and to try to atone for them.

Adam and Eve trembled on hearing the voice of God. They were ashamed of what they had done. Everyone's heart trembles on hearing the question "Where are you?" But it is not meant as a threat but as a help. It is the voice of Someone who cares about us.

Adam and Eve felt guilty. Today, guilt has almost become a dirty word. But guilt can be constructive. It is a sign of a healthy conscience. If people do wrong, they ought to feel guilty. It is a sign of being truly human. Only a psychopath feels no guilt: what one encounters is a scary moral numbness. We don't consider such a person normal or fully human.

When Adam and Eve sinned, there were consequences. Before they sinned, they enjoyed a delightful familiarity with God. They are portrayed as walking with God in the cool of the evening. After their fall, they are afraid of God and try to hide from him. And there is a breakdown between themselves. Where once unity and harmony existed, now there is division and mutual-recrimination. It wasn't God who brought this punishment on them. They brought it on themselves. We are punished not so much for our sins as by our sins.

However, the sad scene ends with a promise of salvation. God takes pity on Adam and Eve and promises to send them a savior. The gospel shows the promise fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus overthrows Satan and establishes the Kingdom of God.

For those who believe in him, and who do God's will, a new kinship is formed and a new intimacy with God becomes possible. As a result of what he did, we are not just God's creatures, but members of God's family. And a new bond is formed between us. Thus, the old divisions are overcome.

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Reflection questions: When was the last time you experienced yourself hiding from God? Could we be hiding from God even while coming to Church?

Courage in time of trial (2nd Reading: 2Cor 4:13-5:1)

In today's second reading, Paul shows himself to be courageous during a difficult time. He says:

*We are not discouraged;
rather, although our outer self is wasting away,
our inner self is renewed day by day.*

Commenting on today's second reading, Fr. Albert Cylwicky, CSB, writes:

Every now and then we are inspired by some example of courage in the face of terminal cancer. We idolize men like Humphrey Bogart and John Wayne who remained stouthearted while their bodies were slowly being destroyed. We admire how women like Marvella Bayh and Ella Grasso could preserve a cheerful outlook while cancer continued to consume their lives.

The serenity of strength of such people stems from some kind of deep faith and firm sense of purpose. They believed in something or someone so strongly that they looked on each day of life that was left as a precious gift to use wisely. As far as we know, St. Paul didn't die from cancer, but he had a similar outlook regarding his own burdens and sufferings.

In his letter to the Corinthians, he writes: *"We believe that he who raised up the Lord Jesus will raise us up along with Jesus. We do not lose heart, because our inner being is renewed each day even though our body is being destroyed at the same time. The present burden of our trial is light enough, and earns for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."*

What a source of encouragement for us when we tend to get downcast because of our trials. Our trials may not be as drastic as terminal cancer, but at times they still tend to get us depressed. It's so easy to exaggerate our burdens and slip into self-pity, to lose perspective regarding our problems and to feel sorry for ourselves. At certain times, we need people like John Wayne and Marvella Bayh to lift us out of the mire of self-pity. We need to hear St. Paul's words to elevate our sights to a vision of our final glory.

When troubles come, we can then take a positive approach. We can take our problems as a time for turning to God in prayer to seek the strength we need to cope with them. When we suffer some kind of loss, we can then look at it optimistically. We can look at it as an opportunity to gain something more excellent, to discover other resources within us. When we've been victimized by someone, we can then make a new beginning. We can start a new and better relationship with other people, or enter into a closer and deeper relationship with Christ.

This later point was especially true with Marvella Bayh. Even though she knew that she had less than a year to live because of cancer, Marvella Bayh often said:

"I've never been happier because I have experienced a rebirth in Jesus Christ. I have the most wonderful peace and quiet in my soul."

If we can live with a faith like that, our own burdens will not seem so heavy. They will actually become lighter because we believe in that eternal weight of glory that awaits us in Christ Jesus. If we can struggle with our own sufferings with a hope like that, then we in turn can become a source of inspiration to others, a help in times of trial, and a light to brighten their darkness.

What a marvelous way to live, what a magnificent way to die. Perhaps someone will be able to say of us what Senator Birch Bayh said about his wife Marvella at her funeral: "Do not mourn for her, but rejoice in the lighting of a new star in the heavens."

Reflection questions: When was the last time you experienced yourself hiding from God? Could we be hiding from God even while coming to Church?

A divided Kingdom, a divided heart

Reflecting on the internal division we sometimes experience within ourselves, Fr. Flor McCarthy writes:

Jesus said that a kingdom which is divided cannot stand. It doesn't require much reflection to see the truth of this. We see countries where there is internal conflict torn asunder. We see families in which there is conflict breaking up.

But the problem affects us on a personal level too. Each of us is a divided kingdom. We are divided within ourselves; we are pulled in opposite directions. There is a war going on inside each of us, a war between light and darkness, between good and evil.

Even though this is an obvious truth, it can take a long time to grasp it. It is a humbling truth, yet there is a kind of freedom in knowing and accepting it. The sooner we come to terms with it, the better.

Even the saints experienced this internal division. This is what St. Paul was talking about when he said very candidly, *"I do not understand my own behavior. The good that I want to do, I do not do; the evil that I want to avoid, I find myself doing"* (Rom 7:15).

We have to face this inner division, and come to terms with it. Within each of us, there is division, darkness, and evil. What we need to do is engage in a process—a process of growth towards wholeness and unity. By the grace of God, the divided self can be made whole.

Those who are unified have great strength. Those who have peace within themselves radiate it to others.

Those who don't, project onto others the conflict going on within themselves.

Sin divides each of us in two: part of us is pulling with God, and part of us is pulling against God. But sin is not something we can throw off once and for all like an old garment. Rather, it is a condition in which we live. What is important is not so much our failures as our struggle for goodness. Once we are seriously struggling for goodness, we are facing in the right direction, and we are on the side of Christ.

Sin also divides us from one another, because essentially sin is a refusal to love. It means that we always put our own needs before those of our neighbor. By their disobedience, Adam and Eve not only brought about a rift between God and them, but also between themselves.

Because of this inner division, we can't afford to be complacent. But neither should we become discouraged. Christ restores us to God's friendship. And by the power of his Spirit, we are able to reach out to our neighbor in forgiveness and reconciliation.

We must go on striving for unity even though we may never attain it here on earth. But because of Christ, we believe that in the end, unity will triumph over division, and good will triumph over evil.

Reflection questions: When was the last time you experienced yourself hiding from God? Could we be hiding from God even while coming to Church?

Putting loyalty to God ahead of loyalty to family

In the second part of today's Gospel, Jesus is forced to decide between loyalty to God over loyalty to family. Fr. Flor writes:

In today's gospel passage, we see some of the frustrations Jesus had to contend with. He had to contend with constant opposition from his enemies. On top of that, there was misunderstanding from his own family.

In his gospel, St. Mark portrays Jesus as constantly surrounded by throngs of needy people. So many wanted to touch him that at times he was in danger of being crushed (3:9). Things got so bad (as we see in today's gospel) that he could not even have a meal in peace.

News of all this reached Nazareth. Worried about the direction his life had taken, his relatives set out to rescue him and bring him back home. They feared for his

safety, and even doubted his sanity. Many great people were at times believed to be mad by their contemporaries.

When they arrived outside the house where he was preaching, their worst fears were confirmed. So many people had gathered that they couldn't even get into the house. It was a chaotic scene. We don't often think of Jesus' ministry like that. Yet this is the scene Mark presents us with.

They sent in a message to him: "Your mother and brothers and sisters are outside asking for you." On hearing this, he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking around at those sitting in a circle around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother."

When Jesus left Nazareth to begin his public ministry, he 'lost' his natural family. But in the meantime, he had gained another family—the family of his disciples. He was calling people into a spiritual family, into a new community, not built upon bonds of blood and nation.

Relatives are not always the people to whom we are closest. Blood relationship is important but it is not everything. It doesn't automatically confer closeness. The natural family is only the beginning.

Jesus refused to go back home with his relatives. Even his mother couldn't prevail upon him to do so. It can't have been easy for him to say no to his relatives and especially to his mother. Mary must have felt it. But all parents have to learn this painful lesson—to let go of their children.

It must have been tempting for Jesus to go back to the peace and quiet of Nazareth. His mission was proving frustrating. Even the good that he did (such as expelling demons) was deliberately misinterpreted by the scribes. They perversely claimed that it is through the power of the devil that he cast out devils.

Given all of this, it would have been a good moment to quit. But he refused to do so. He had a mission to accomplish, a mission given him by the Father. He had committed himself to that mission. He had grown into his vocation and would not opt out now. On one occasion, he had said to his disciples, "No one who puts his hand to the plough and then looks back is fit for the Kingdom of heaven."

Those who are in a difficult situation, and who may be tempted to walk away, can draw strength from the example of Jesus.

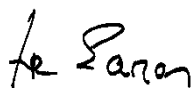
Jesus was calling people to a new community, into a spiritual family. Family or racial ties don't necessarily create community. Belief in Jesus and the practice of

God's will are what create community. This new community is based not on bonds of flesh and blood but on faith and love. Those who hear and do the will of God are now Jesus' brothers and sisters and mother.

Jesus gives us an example of faithfulness in a time of darkness. With his example to inspire us, and his grace to strengthen us, we too can be faithful to our vocation as his disciples.

Reflection questions: Are you ever torn between loyalty to God and loyalty to family? What helps you to deal with this challenge?

Have a blessed week,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Aaron". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.