Mar 10, 2019

First Sunday of Lent (C)
Deut 26:4-10; Ps 91:1-2, 10-15; Rom 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13

By Dianne Bergant, CSA

For many people, Lent is a time for renewing some of the resolutions made at the time of New Year but not carried through. It is a time to pay to God what we should have given in the first place, but failed to do so. How sad if this is how Lent is understood. New Year resolutions and Lenten practices too often mirror unrealistic regimens of physical feats that are doomed to failure because we misunderstand their purpose and their goal. Any program of improvement should stem from the reality of our identity at this moment and how we hope to live authentically. Today’s readings throw some light on these two matters.

The reading from Deuteronomy clearly traces the history and identity of the ancient Israelites. They were wanderers, aliens, landless people who were maltreated and oppressed, but delivered by their God and settled in a bountiful land. The story itself is told in the form of a cultic recital. This means that whenever the story was retold, those present believed that they actually participated in the actions recounted (“we cried to the LORD...he brought us out of Egypt...gave us this land (Deut 26:7, 8, 9).

As children of Abraham, this is our story as well. We are all wanderers, aliens, landless people. If this is not our immediate experience, it is because we have been delivered by our God and settled in a bountiful land. This is our identity. Do our lives show that we realize this? How might this portrait of our identity influence our Lenten practices? And, as members of the body of Christ, what might be our responsibility to those who are presently experiencing such hardships?

Many scholars maintain that the story of Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness reflects his understanding of his unique role as messiah. What did it mean to be messiah? He is first tempted to use his extraordinary power to provide bread for himself and, presumably, for others as well. The tempter then states that he will relinquish his power over the world so that the reign of God might more easily be established, if Jesus will simply bow down before him. Finally, Jesus is told to cast himself down from the heights of the temple in order to see if God will really protect him.

Jesus refuses to use his power to transform the world in extraordinary ways. Instead, he will provide bread for the hungry through the agency of women and men like you and me. He will
bring forth the reign of God in minds and hearts as you and I care for the needy, protect the abandoned, and forgive those who offend us. Assuring us of God’s protection, he will be the source of our courage as we continue to fashion a way of living in truth and love.

Today’s first reading tells us who we really are as we stand before God and shoulder-to-shoulder with each other. The second reading challenges us to accept our responsibilities as the body of Christ in the world today. Acknowledging this identity and our call as Christians, we are now ready to decide on authentic Lenten practices.

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