

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” DEDICATION OF THE LATERAN BASILICA
Ezekiel 47: 1-2, 8-9, 12 Psalm 46 I Corinthians 3: 9-11 John 2: 13-22
By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

This is not a feast most Sunday church goers get a chance to celebrate. It falls on November 9th , and, as a feast of the Lord, replaces what would have been the 32nd. Sunday in Ordinary time. All this won't make much sense or matter to most people in the pews today, unless we can show the meaning of the feast and its significance to our lives.

If we want to give some information or background about the feast we might do that before the celebration begins. The person who welcomes the congregation might read a short description of the feast, thus leaving the preacher free to focus on the readings and the liturgical setting. Patricia Datchuk Sanchez has a fine reflection on some of the world's principle holy places in her commentary for this Sunday. ("Celebration", November, 2003. Page 501. I have to admit that in my own preaching, she has been my favorite weekly resource.) St. John Lateran, the Church of the Most Holy Savior, is a Roman basilica built in the fourth century. It is the cathedral for the bishop of Rome, the pope. Hence it is considered our mother church. Other Christians share with us its importance because the Lateran basilica goes back to the conversion of the emperor Constantine and the end of Christian persecution by Rome. Hence, we celebrate today those places in the world where we are free to gather and pray. And we remember Christians who still suffer for their faith.

We call places that are specially dedicated to God for worship—"holy". For the Jews, the temple was a unique place where believers experienced the Holy One's presence. We hear in today's gospel that for us Christians, Jesus Christ is our place for the unique and full encounter with God. When we gather, as we do for worship, we also believe that God is to be found within our community, another temple with a holy presence. Through word and sacrament today, the temple of God's people are renewed in our dedication to God and our call to be a holy presence of God to others and to all creation.

Ezekiel was a prophet to the exiled Israelites in Babylon. He was a priest, but the

Babylonians had destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and so Ezekiel was living with the exiles in Babylon on the river Chebar. Perhaps his living by a flowing river was the inspiration for his vision of a restored temple from which life-giving waters flowed. Ezekiel's message to his faith community in exile was to remind them of God's power and purpose. Though the people were defeated and the temple destroyed, Ezekiel inspired their faith in God and their hope that God's plan for restoration would not be thwarted.

Ezekiel was hard on the people, claiming that since they had deserted God, God had left them to their own devices. The collapse of the nation and the destruction of Jerusalem's temple in 586 B.C.E. was their own fault, a result of their turning from God. But Ezekiel also reminds the people that God isn't fixed to one place. If the people are in exile, then God is in exile with them. No physical structure can box God into one specific geographical location—or, for that matter, to one religious practice. Ezekiel anticipates God's plan of restoration for the people; there would be a new temple filled to overflowing with God's healing presence.

Notice in Ezekiel's reflection today that holiness isn't restricted to the temple precincts; it flows like a swelling stream to bring life, abundance and healing to all. In preparing a preaching from the reading, the preacher has rich imagery with which to play and pray. There's no restricting the places where the healing waters flow. God cannot be "channeled" to only select places and rituals for healing. Even we who, in our tradition, celebrate a sacrament of healing affirm that God's healing of body and spirit isn't just available at certain times and places. Our sacrament proclaims a God of healing who, in Jesus Christ, constantly and in myriad ways, reaches out a healing hand to humanity.

The prophet is at the door of the temple; that's the place from which the life-giving waters flow. It is hard not to think of all of us who have come to worship here in this new temple of the Lord. The church building is a special gathering place for us today, a place of refreshment, rest, rededication, and restoration. But just as we came through the doors into this sanctuary, so shall we go forth. Ezekiel tells us "wherever the river flows...." there will be an abundance of life and healing. We hear in this image a call to each of us to be life-giving waters in our daily lives, quenching the thirst of those yearning for love, recognition, and solace. The church itself must be a constant sign to the world of the healing flow of God's love to all peoples and nations. Where the Christian community is, there people must

meet the abundant stream of God's love for all. Let peace flow a river....let justice flow down....let there be no poor where this river flows....let Christians flood the world with the presence of an all-embracing God....let those who thirst for forgiveness be quenched in these flood waters....let the young sprout in these waters and the elderly sit in peace and security by its shores under the shade of its verdant trees.

There is reassurance for our church in the Ezekiel reading. Today's feast reminds us of our ancient roots and that through some very difficult and sinful periods, God has not abandoned us. Indeed, living waters have flown from the crucified One's side numerous times to bring healing and rebirth to the church. These days, filled as they are with such distressing church news, can make us feel like exiles in Babylon, taken against our will to a foreign land, looking back to our damaged temple with nostalgia and longing.

But Ezekiel is hopeful for us and we eagerly claim and are fortified by his vision. Despite the catastrophe, he tells exiles, God has not abandoned us. He reminds us that God is our holy place and we Christians believe Jesus is our permanent and undefiled temple. We not only have a past; we have a future. But not without our participation. At this celebration we invite God to stir up our baptismal waters and enable all in the church to be part of the renewal of this temple, both by actively participating and also claiming our responsibility as full members. In his own way, Paul reminds us that, "You are God's building." God has called us together and made us a temple within which the Spirit dwells. But he also reminds us that we are co-workers in this enterprise; through his preaching Paul laid the foundation and he calls those who have followed him to continue in the construction.

We pray in this, our holy place today, that Jesus the living temple will heal our brokenness and recent scandal-caused wounds. We ask him to go with us to discover and announce the Holy One's presence in our world by our feeding the hungry, healing the sick and reconciling enemies. Ezekiel see a temple filled and over flowing with life-giving powers. We pray today, "So be it. Amen, amen!"

QUOTABLE

Perhaps it is not our eyes that are at fault, but our hearts, for we do not love the

world enough. We are not merely unprofitable, we are ungracious, lacking the good sense to revel in the sheer loveliness of our universe and the ecstatic joy of our presence to each other. We are challenged not to wait for, but actively to seek out, the abundance of God's love already present among us, challenged to stop expecting the abundance of life like a reward for the righteous, but rather to share of our own abundance, like God's rainfall, with the unrighteous and the unrepentant."

---Francis Baur, O.F.M., in LIFE IN ABUNDANCE.

JUSTICE NOTES

(These weekly quotes may be helpful in your preaching or may also be added to your weekly parish bulletin as a way of informing your faith community on some social issues.)

modern economics, politics and culture.

What is meant by Catholic social teaching?

There is a broad and a narrow understanding to the expression Catholic social teaching. Viewed one way, Catholic social teaching (hereafter CST) encompasses all the ideas and theories that have developed over the entire history of the Church on matters of social life. More commonly, as the term has come to be understood, CST refers to a limited body of literature written in the modern era that is a response of papal and episcopal teachers to the various political, economic and social issues of our time. Even this more narrow understanding, however, is not neatly defined.

No official list of documents exists; it is more a matter of general consensus which documents fall into the category of CST. Some documents, for example *Rerum Novarum* (an encyclical letter by Leo XIII) are on everyone's list while the Christmas radio addresses of Pius XII are cited by some but not all as part of the heritage. Most people, when referring to CST, use Leo's 1891 encyclical as a benchmark for the beginning of the tradition of social teaching. Yet not only did Leo write important encyclicals on politics before *Rerum Novarum* but a number of his predecessors promulgated significant statements on a variety of social matters. Thus, it can be argued that since the modern papal practice of issuing encyclicals began with Benedict XIV (1740-1758) many of these pre-Leonine letters should be considered part of CST. (Michael Schuck's book *That They Be One* is a fine overview of the entire body of social teaching found in the papal encyclicals.)

Clearly, the expression CST is elastic, sometimes designating an expansive body of material and at other times used in a more constricted sense to identify a limited number of papal and episcopal writings dating from the papacy of Leo XIII. Perhaps we can understand the term Catholic social teaching as an effort by the pastoral teachers of the church to articulate what the broader social tradition means in the era of Why does the church get caught up in political and economic issues that others should be dealing with instead of doing the one thing the Church is supposed to do, serve the spiritual dimension of life?

-----From the webpage of the Archdiocese of St. Paul, Minneapolis

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty."

Thanks, Jude Siciliano, OP

Please write to:.....

James King #0226428 (On death row since 11/23/98)

Melvin Hardy #0490944 (12/18/98)

Jeffery Meyer #0280127 (2/4/99)

Anthony Bone #003728 (2/5/99)

-----Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. CD Available: **"FIRST IMPRESSIONS: PREACHING REFLECTIONS ON LITURGICAL YEAR A."** The CD contains two reflections for almost all the Sundays and major feasts of the year. In addition, there are helpful essays for preaching during the liturgical seasons (Advent, Lent, the Triduum, etc.), ten book reviews and essays on various aspects of preaching. The files are in three formats (Microsoft Word, WordPerfect and Adobe Acrobat Reader) so you should have no trouble opening them on your computer. To purchase go to: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> click on the "Year A-CD" button on the right and follow the instructions.
2. I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use "First Impressions" in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own.

(Judeop@Juno.com)

3. Our webpages: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> and <http://www.opsouth.org/>
(Where you will find "Preachers' Exchange," which includes "First Impressions" and "Homilias Dominicales," as well as articles, book reviews and quotes pertinent to preaching.)

4. "Homilias Dominicales"-- these Spanish reflections are written by three friars of the Southern Dominican Province, Jose David Padilla, OP, Wilmo Candanedo, OP and two Dominican sisters, Regina Mc Carthy, OP and Doris Regan, OP. Like "First Impressions", "Homilias Dominicales" are a preacher's early reflections on the upcoming Sunday readings and liturgy. So, if you or a friend would like to receive "Homilias Dominicales" drop a note to John Boll, O.P. at: Jboll@opsouth.org or jboll@preacherexchange.org

5. "First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, send a note to John Boll at the above Email address.

DONATIONS

If you would like to support this ministry, please send tax deductible contributions to Jude Siciliano, O.P., whose address is listed below. Make checks to: Dominican Friars of Raleigh. Or, go to our webpage to make an online donation: <http://www.preacherexchange.com>

Thank you.

Blessings on your preaching,

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