

Scripture, Prayers, and Reflection for 16 August 2020

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (From the Book of Common Prayer, USA)

Scriptures for Today

A Reading from the Old Testament

Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.



Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.” And they came closer. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.’ And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him. (Genesis 45:1-15)

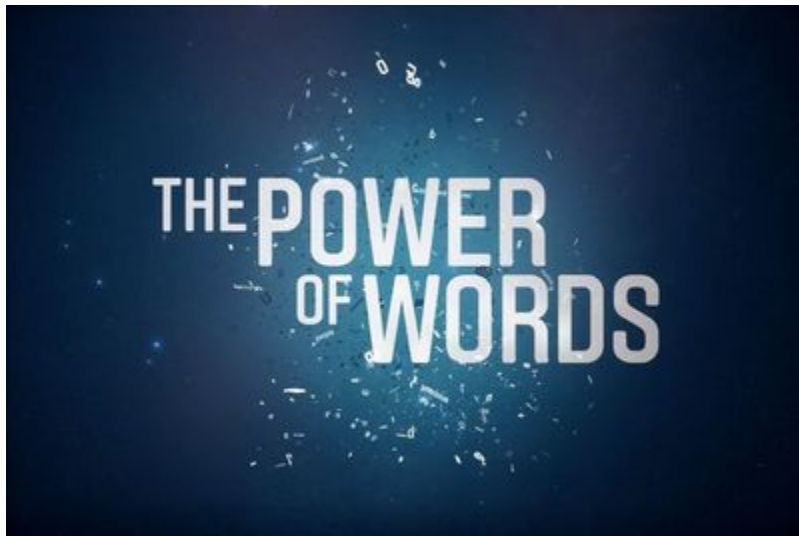
The Gospel

Jesus called the crowd to him and said to them, “Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.” Then the disciples approached and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?” He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.” But Peter said to him, “Explain this parable to us.” Then he said, “Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly. (Matthew 15:10-28)

Reflection

I have a very limited knowledge of Spanish, although I’m trying to correct that! When I’m in a Spanish-speaking country, I do know enough to know that pronunciation is



critical because a not pronounced correctly can convey a totally different meaning. And there's always the opportunity for miscommunication when I try to translate an American idiom into another language. For example, if you try to translate the following from English to Russian, back to English: 'Out of sight, out of mind' you end up with: 'Invisible idiot'. From English to Japanese, back to English: 'To be or not to be, that is the

question' (from Hamlet) ends up: 'It is, it is not, what is it?'

We all know that language is important; words do matter.

You see that in the readings for the day. Look at Joseph and his conversation with his brothers. Remember they were the ones wanted to kill their brother. One of the brothers talked them out of that so instead they threw him into a pit and then sold Joseph into slavery when some slave-traders happened by. Now, he's the second in command in the mighty nation of Egypt and his brothers now stand before him—powerless and completely at his mercy.

If you were in Joseph's sandals, what would you have said?

In the gospel reading Jesus' refers to the Pharisees are all worked up over ritual and religious purity: eating the correct foods in the correct way. And, yet, they were so concerned about maintaining purity that they forgot the whole purpose for which Israel was created—to be a blessing to the world. Jesus calls them out: "it's not what you put in your mouth that defiles you; it's what comes out." Because what comes out is the real indication of who and what you are inside.

Our words matter. There are many, many Scripture passages in the Bible that underscore what Jesus is talking about. May I give you a few?

Proverbs 12:18: "Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."

Matthew. 5:37: "Let your yes be yes, and your no, no."

Ephesians 4:29: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

Scripture urges us over and over to tell the truth, to think before we speak. Don't make promises you do not intend to keep. Your word should be your bond. Conversation seasoned with grace, humility, wisdom and good humor can win friends and smooth troubled waters.

In JRR Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" the hobbits are on a quest to destroy the ring which is a terrible force of evil in the world. They run into a deep wood and suddenly find themselves surrounded by old trees, wise old talking trees. The trees are called Ents and the language they use is called Entish. Treebeard, the leader of the Ents, describes his language like this: "Entish is a lovely language, but it takes a long time to say anything in it, because we do not say anything in it, unless it is worth taking a very long time to say."

The language we use, the words we speak have power. They are to come from a heart in process of being formed after the character of Jesus. The words that come from a such heart are words of kindness, and generosity, words of good humor and hope, words of beauty and truth, words that "take a very long time to say." There is only one way to learn to say such words, and that is to practice saying kind things, forgiving things, encouraging things, hopeful things, beautiful things; words that come from the truest parts of ourselves.

The way we respond, what we say in a given moment, is a mirror into our hearts. I wonder if you can remember a time when you said something you regretted. If your experience is like mine, that list is longer than one would like. Maybe it was a harsh or hurtful word to a family member. Maybe it was an email you sent to a friend or colleague and as soon as you hit the send button you wanted to take it back. Maybe you were confronted with bad news and your words in response were not the ones you would have preferred to use. Maybe you were cut off in traffic and your verbal response to the other driver was, shall we say, less than Christian. We can all think of times we'd like to take back our words.

Now think of a time when you said words that were right and good, or someone said something to you in a moment that meant everything. Maybe it was at the bedside of a loved one who was dying and you knew you couldn't fix it or take away the pain or make it all better and you simply said, "I love you so much." Or maybe in the midst of a dark hour a friend called and said, "I'm so sorry. I'm thinking of you. I'm praying for you." And the tone of voice expressed as much as the words themselves. Or maybe a friend or loved one knocked on the door one evening and said, "Can we talk," and that was the beginning of a conversation that changed the course of your life. What we say matters. Our words matter. Jesus says it is not what goes into the body that is significant, but what comes out of the mouth. Jesus asks us to allow the truth of who we are to come from the depths of our hearts, and for our hearts to beat with the rhythm of God's very own heart.

Our words matter because in the depths of God's heart there is The Word. The words that we say come from our hearts in the same way that Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, comes from the very heart of God.

Our world needs to hear words that come from God's heart; words of love, grace, courage, and reason. The truth is when we learn to talk that way it will be because those words are coming from a heart that is becoming more beautiful, more Christ-like with every passing day. May it be so! Amen.

Prayers

O God, who has filled the world with beauty: Open our eyes to behold your gracious hand in all thy works; that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve you

with gladness; for the sake of him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

O God, our heavenly Father, whose glory fills the whole creation, and whose presence we find wherever we go: Preserve those who travel [in particular _____]; surround them with your loving care; protect them from every danger; and bring them in safety to their journey's end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Almighty God, we entrust all who are dear to us to your neverfailing care and love, for this life and the life to come, knowing that you are doing for them better things than we can desire or pray for; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Blessing

May God, who created, redeemed, and renews you, keep you in peace. And the blessing of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon you and remain with you forever. *Amen.*

God grace and peace be with you all, and Buen Camino!

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