



Revive My Soul

Psalm 19

*The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.*

March 8, 2015

Thoughts for the Week

Scriptures: Genesis 22:1-18 • Romans 8: 31b-34 • Mark 9: 2-10

As we all know simply from reading the news or watching television, there are many individuals who do not fit the pattern of normal everyday people: race car drivers, channel swimmers, people who try to dazzle us by breaking records: land speed records, canyon leapers, even the gorging of hot dogs and many other records. In recent times the news told us about two young men who could be called “wall-climbers,” for that is what they do, if not for a living, at least for pleasure. Their names are Kevin Jorgeson and Tommy Caldwell. Their feat was to climb the Dawn Wall (The Wall of the Early Morning Light), a rock face in Yosemite Valley, California. At first this may not sound very newsworthy, but the Dawn Wall is a sheer vertical cliff with few handholds. Moreover these two young men climbed the Dawn Wall without protection gear except a safety rope in case they should fall which, by the way, they did on several occasions.

People who stood aghast watching the climb from the valley floor said that they were either very brave or complete fools. (take your pick!) Ultimately, I should think that the only people who truly know the feeling of climbing a mountain wall like that are the climbers themselves.

When the two were interviewed afterward, they did indeed share their thoughts about the accomplishment. They said that it's difficult to imagine what goes on in one's mind at that time because the entire effort is concentrated on getting to the top. But once the summit is reached, there is a feeling of pure exhilaration and even a sense of astonishment at what the world looks like from the top. It is an experience that can only be understood by a person who has struggled through fear and danger until success has finally been achieved.

It's only after having struggled to reach a difficult goal that the sense of triumph becomes clear and a different, clearer sense of life itself takes place. Myself, although I have never climbed a mountain, I have succeeded in many struggles, especially in sports but some in my personal life. I know the exhilaration of “winning” and also the depression of “losing”. You might think that only winning is better, but sometimes we learn so much more from our losses. Assuming we learn from our setbacks, they too can be put in the “win column”.

Now, after all that, let's turn to the scriptures for this Third Sunday in Lent and strangely, we find there two stories about mountain top experiences. The first lesson comes from the book of *Genesis* that tells the strange story of the sacrifice of Isaac, the young and only son of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham hears the mysterious voice of God calling him to take his son to a high mountain (Moriah) and offer him to God. When he reaches the sacrificial spot and prepares for the oblation, God speaks to him again, warning him not to harm the child. Strange as it sounds, it was a test of Abraham's faith.

However, with a deeper exploration of the sad event, one might say that on the mountain, it suddenly became brilliantly clear to Abraham that God was not calling him to offer up his son. It was all a kind of divine invitation to something higher, more humane, a clearer view of life over death.

The gospel holds the story of what Christians have described as the Transfiguration event. Once again, Jesus invites his three closest friends, Peter, James and John to accompany him on a climb of a “very high mountain.”

Once at the top, Jesus' presence became "translucent," and the three experience Jesus in a spectacularly different manner than they had in their daily rounds with him down below. Did they suddenly experience Jesus as divine, as God? The text does not seem to indicate that. It is clear, however, that they saw Jesus in a different light. One is tempted to say that mountain atmosphere always make all things clearer. One can also say that there are moments in one's life when truth suddenly becomes clearer and then we suddenly begin to see life differently.

Let me suggest that this scripture passage somehow fits the spirit of Lent. During this season we are invited to see our life differently, more clearly, more truthfully, more open to the light that Christ casts our way.

Most folks, of course, do not climb mountains, whether in Lent or any other time, but there is a certain satisfaction in knowing that in Lent we are invited once again to see life the way Christ invites us to see it.

Happy Birthday Ray

Prayer Thought for the Week

Great God, Creator of all, we seek your guidance as we pursue peace in our world. We confess our shortcomings and seek your forgiveness. Help us embrace the fullness of your grace and respond to others with compassion and generosity.

We seek peace within and among all nations and especially uphold the people of Andorra. May the leaders of all nations promote policies that ensure justice and uphold the worth of all persons.

We pray that we may become the body of the Christ who is our teacher and guide. May our desires be a reflection of your plan for all creation to be at peace. Hear our prayer, O God, as we offer ourselves as instruments of your peace. Amen.

Stewardship Thoughts for Lent

Early in Genesis the Lord commands man to abstain from partaking of the prohibited fruit: *And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."* (Gen 2: 16-17). Considering this divine injunction, it is obvious that fasting was ordained in Paradise, and the first commandment in this sense was delivered to Adam. We can thus conclude that "You shall not eat" is a law of fasting and abstinence.

In our own contemporary time, fasting seems to have lost something of its spiritual meaning, and has taken on, in a culture characterized by the search for material well-being, a therapeutic value for the care of one's body. It can certainly be argued that fasting brings benefits to our physical well being, but for Christians, it's a therapy to heal all that prevents us from conformity to the will of God.

Voluntary fasting enables us to grow in the spirit of the Good Samaritan, who conscientiously goes to the help of his suffering brother. By freely embracing this act of self-denial for the sake of another, we make a statement that our brother or sister-in-need is not a stranger.

What's important to remember is to fast for the right reason; not to lose weight, or to accomplish something for your own pride, but to unite your sacrifice to Christ. Allow your hunger to remind you NOT of what you're *not eating* or to make you *grumpy*, but to be a *reminder to pray*, like a personal intestinal alarm. Gurgle, I'm hungry! = Time to pray. See? Simple. It's the easiest way to answer Paul's call in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to "*pray without ceasing*".