

Isaiah 49: 8-15
Psalm 145
John 5: 17-30

Homily for March 30, 2022
Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

1.

Today we hear from the Gospel of John.

What is scandalous and a blasphemy to some is a comfort and consoling Truth to others.

One leads to a raging unbelief, the other leads to committed belief.

One turns away to incriminate, the other to follow as disciple.

During the Passion Narrative, as recorded in the Gospel of Mark, Caiaphas the high priest asks Jesus if he is the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One.

Jesus answers: "I Am."

That answer sealed his fate.

"I AM" --Equal to God. In that scene, Jesus is on trial as a human being and still proclaiming his authority that is equal to the Divine.

The title "Son of God" is used sparingly by Jesus in the New Testament. Jesus used the term "Abba" that is Father, to refer to his Divine Sonship. He is humanly aware of being One with the Father in a direct, familial way.

"One With"—equal.

The text we ponder today is the expression of Jesus as experiencing himself as Son. The revelation and the work of the Son implies and is the same as the revelation and work of the Father.

Let's put that together with the image of God in the Isaiah reading we hear today.

God is a loving, compassionate mother: forgiving, embracing, nurturing, tender and gentle.

A God, a mother, who can never forget her child.

St. Augustine wrote: That God loves each of us as an only child, and that has to be true.

2.

We have come to know well many images of God. We have at times settled into one or another that resonates with our needs and desires at each stage of our growing hearts and spirits.

The Cosmic Christ, the Christ in the evolving universe speaks to us.

The Christ of the Gospels, the human face of the Divine. In the wisdom and teaching of St.

Teresa of Avila, she encourages us to seek the human person of Jesus to learn his ways and so to follow him.

We look to the Prophetic Mission of Jesus in his Mission to confront evil and to raise up Truth and Justice for the poor.

With each person here—what a rich sharing we have had over the years of our relationship to and with the one we know as eternal God and always ministering to our human ways as human.

In all of this, the Word that comes to me is Presence. A Divine presence that communicates that presence very personally in every human way that we can know, feel and be assured.

Throughout John's Gospel we hear Jesus repeatedly identifying himself as "I AM" the Divine Name.

Fr. Stuemueller explains this name in terms of Presence.

"I Am Who Am With You"

And so, we read: I am with you as bread, as light, as shepherd, in dying and rising, as living water, as vine, as your way.

All human and earthy presences for us to live our lives.

I lift up this line of today's reading for us: "My Father is still working, and I also am working."

We are witness to that in our own lives. We see it all around us.

3.

I especially want to bring up two well-known followers of Jesus celebrated today on the anniversary of their death.

Karl Rahner who died in 1984 at age 80 and

Thea Bowman who died in 1992 at age 52.

Karl Rahner was a theological anchor of the Second Vatican Council. The lynch pin of Rahner's theology is this simple idea: God is present, not absent. He did not get this idea from philosophers such as Kant or Heidegger. He got it from letting his heart pay attention to the Gospel. He wrote about it and spoke about it on behalf of the Church and of the world.

Because of the oppression, destruction, and human slaughter that in the wake of two world wars and the continuing pervasiveness of violence, Christians concluded that God lived somewhere else. So, the Church behaved as if God were absent. We prayed for God to come and bless us, to arrive and show mercy and to visit us with grace and love. This assumed that where we lived was not God's home. So, the Church believed that we need to shut out our world and imagine that salvation was to live in some better place.

Rahner helped the Vatican Council to see clearly that there is a bridge. It is found in the liturgy, the way we pray. We pray to thank God because God is present and has not given up on us. We pray to overcome our fear so that we might be of service to the world.

Thea Bowman: a great treasure of the American Catholic church. As the only Black face in a white religious community, she had no desire to blend in. She brought with her a strong sense of her identity as a black Catholic woman, and believed she had a very special vocation. She was committed to asserting a black way of being Catholic.

A spellbinding speaker, she sang the spirituals, she testified to the Spirit, she contributed immensely to the Church with the cultural diversity that was sadly lacking in America.

This remarkable woman even moved Catholic bishops to stand and join hands and sing "We Shall Overcome". A striking example of God's Presence in human affairs. A gift to the church and the world.