

## WEDNESDAY THIRD WEEK OF LENT

Reflection

by Mary Ellen Sheehan, IHM

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Texts: Deut 4:1,5-9; Matthew 5:17-19

The first reading that we have proclaimed today is from the Book of Deuteronomy, the last Book of the Jewish Torah or the Pentateuch as we Christians call it. The Jews who had been wandering for forty days in the desert were about to enter the land of Israel promised to them by the Lord our God. Moses speaks to his people as a loving father, reminding them of God's love for them and that they need to keep the Covenant where God emboldens them as God's holy people.

Contemporary scholars believe that Deuteronomy was written in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, long after the time of Moses's death. The author of Deuteronomy inserts Moses into it as a storyteller. In Deuteronomy Moses encourages the Jewish people in three narratives. In Chapter 1:1-4:43 he reviews Israel's history in the first four Books of the Pentateuch. In Chapter 4:44-26:18 he elaborates on the Covenant Law. In Chapter 27:1-34:10 he blesses the Jewish people and then he goes off to die. In all three of these accounts, Moses speaks to the Jewish people *in the first person* and reassures his people to be faithful to the Covenant.

In the Twenty-One Books of the New Testament, Deuteronomy is quoted almost one hundred times. When asked by some Scribes and Pharisees about what is the greatest commandment of all, Jesus quotes the *Shema* from Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

*Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone!  
Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your  
heart, and with all your soul, and with your strength. Take to  
heart these words which I enjoin on you today. Teach them  
to your children. All three Synoptic Gospels add a second  
commandment, Love your neighbor as yourself.*

The Gospel proclaimed this morning is from Matthew. Contemporary scholars agree that Matthew was a Greek speaking second century

Jewish Christian. His Gospel was written for a Jewish audience who were also followers of Jesus. Quoting so many Old Testament prophets, he appeals to his Jewish converts that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophets. He is the Messiah that the prophets have predicted.

Our text today is from the Sermon on the Mount. Just before this text is the parable of light where Jesus proclaims to the crowd before him:

*You are the light of the world ... let your light so shine before people that they may see your good works and give glory to your God who is in heaven.*

And just before that text are the Beatitudes where Jesus proclaims that.

*those who mourn will be comforted, the merciful will all be given mercy, the pure in heart will see God, and the peacemakers will be called the daughters and sons of God.*

This text is unique to Matthew's Gospel, but it omits a verse. Following it, Matthew declares in verse 20:

*For I tell you, unless your justice exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*

In Matthew's Gospel, some of the Scribes and Pharisees adhere to the "letter of the law of the Covenant." But far better is Jesus proclaiming the Beatitudes,

*those who mourn will be comforted, the merciful will all be given mercy, the pure in heart will see God, and the peacemakers will be called the daughters and sons of God.*

Matthew proclaims *fully* that Jesus is faithful to the Law of the Covenant, but not rigidly as some Scribes and Pharisee do.

For our reflection on the two readings that we have proclaimed today, let us speak *in the first person* as Moses does in the first reading and let us claim for ourselves that we continue *to see God*, as Jesus does in the second reading. Let us pray *intensely* to God for peace between the Palestinian people and the Jewish people of Israel and for peace

between the Ukrainian people and Russian people. Let us not be put off by the images that we see on TV with people starving, and especially women and children, in the Gaza Strip.

*Let us be light to the world to see our good works and pray intensely to God for the Palestinian people.*