

A 8th Sunday March 1-2, 2014

♪ *I will never forget you, my people, I have carved you on the palm of my hand.
I will never forget you, I will not leave you orphaned. I will never forget my own.
Does a mother forget her baby? Or woman the child within her womb?
Yet even if these forget, yes, even if these forget, I will never forget my own.* ♪ (Isaiah 49:14-15)

That song sets the 1st reading to music - and is a celebration of the love of our God.

Before Hurricane Irene swept through the house which was our ministry center and my residence in August, 2011, we were worried about how Bethany Ministries was going to survive. After we lost a lot of our ministry materials & most of my personal possessions Jesus kept the promise he makes in the Gospel and provided much more than what we had lost. On Feb. 15, 2014, I moved into a new residence which has become our new ministry center, after 2 ½ years of living in temporary lodgings - I often call it "camping" - while Anna's small apartment overflowed with our ministry materials.

Since then, when someone asks me, "How are you?" I usually answer, "I'm good *today*." When they look puzzled or shocked, I explain, "Yesterday is gone and tomorrow is God's problem, all I have is today." That is the attitude that Jesus is asking at the end of the Gospel for today. But to have that attitude, to live in this present moment (which is far from easy), we need to know who God really is and what the Lord is calling each of us to do as we live each day.

The song we began with suggests that God is a mother. But the Gospel & the prayer we call the Lord's Prayer talk about God as a father. So which is it?

And the answer, according to the Scripture and the Church, is: - It's **Both!**

In the 2nd reading, St. Paul calls himself a steward of the mysteries of God. One of those deep mysteries is that the God who created us male and female, created us in the image of God's very self, and in the scriptures today it is very clear that God cares for us with love that is BOTH motherly and fatherly and more.

We are called to trust God to give the gifts that we need; we are called to receive them with gratitude; Like St. Paul in the 2nd reading, we are called to be good stewards of all God's gifts by using them to help each other. But what happens when we fail to trust God and put our trust in "mammon"? And what does that strange word mean?

In Greek, it literally means "money" or "riches," but it is more than that.

When we say in the Creed, "I believe in one God..." we are professing "Monotheism." But I believe that the prevailing religion of our time could be called "money-theism."

The best description I have come across of what is meant by the false god named "mammon" is what Richard Rohr calls the "unholy trinity" of power, possessions and pleasure. When we find ourselves slipping into depending on any of those three for our meaning and salvation, we need to meet the one who is ready to forgive and to restore our vision of who God really is.

Jesus says, 4 times in today's Gospel passage, "Don't worry." One of my teachers used to say that worry is to put your faith and trust in what you *don't* want to happen. When Jesus says, "Don't worry," he is saying to all of us - "I will take care of you. If you are poor - let go of your worries about survival. If you are rich, you can be released from the anxiety that comes from dependence on possessions.

If you - like most of us - are anywhere in between, Jesus is saying, "Learn to hear my words from the awareness of your own need, whether that need is physical or spiritual, and, most of all, take care of each other so that all will know that you are my disciples and no one will be in need."

We do not go to God alone. We need each other & we affect each other. We are not in relationship to God only as individuals. Our relationship with God needs the human connection which Jesus provides through his body, that is, through the other children of the God who is both Father and Mother to all of us. That is what the Church is really all about.

To understand that truth is to begin to be healed of our anxieties, our worries, and the wounds we receive from a culture that in many ways worships power, possessions and pleasure. And to live that truth is to begin to spread the good news of God's love, mercy and healing peace.

Today's Scriptures leave us with some questions to reflect on
as we stand on the brink of the beginning of Lent.

What does it mean to have faith in God?

How does Jesus work through his body, the Church, to respond to our needs?

Am I possessed by God or by what the Gospel calls "mammon"?

Are we good stewards of all of God's gifts?

The Word of God today invites us to deepen our trust in the God who loves us more than a mother or father. Jesus invites us all to grow in being good stewards of the gifts we have received and to grow in seeking first the kingdom of God in our day to day lives.

The song we want to leave you with is a setting of the central point of Jesus' preaching in the Gospel today - and includes some of the last alleluias until Easter:

♪ Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and God's righteousness,
And all these things will be added unto you, Alle-lu, Alleluia. ♪

Readings for the Mass

First Reading - Isaiah 49:14-15 [I will never forget you]

Responsorial Psalm - Psalm 62 "Rest in God alone, my soul."

Second Reading - 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 [we are stewards of the mysteries of God]

Gospel - Matthew 6:24-34 [Do not worry about tomorrow; seek first the kingdom of God]