

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

11th Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Exodus 19.1-6a)

God Chooses Israel to be his own Possession

This reading records the special moment when God chose Israel to be his own possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, formed of 12 tribes, just as in the gospel reading Jesus will chose Twelve to be the nucleus of his holy Kingdom.

God had led them out of slavery in Egypt with a purpose: they were to be gradually formed and enlightened to bring God's Good News to the whole of creation. First, they were given the Law (The Ten Commandments come just after this passage.), which would teach them how the people of God must live out their vocation. 'Be holy as I am holy', acting in the image of God, completing God's work of creation. It was not going to be a smooth path. They rebelled already in the desert, hankering after the 'leeks and onions' of Egypt, and the history of Israel was to be a constant series of rebellion, recall and forgiveness - just like our relationship with God, full of failure and return.

Formation always involves a fair amount of buffeting and correction, spiritual growing pains as well as physical. Like ours, their learning process was slow and full of mistakes, but, in the end, they brought salvation into the world in the person of Jesus.

Question:

What can it mean that we are a kingdom of priests?

Second reading:

(Romans 5.6-11)

The Proof of God's Love

Paul uses several different images to convey the unique work of Christ. Here he uses 'reconciled', 'justified', 'saved'. Is there any difference between them?

We have been reconciled and justified by Christ's death, and we shall be saved by his life, presumably by his risen and glorious life after the Resurrection, which will lead us to share with him in glory; this is still in the future, the end-product. But we have already been reconciled with God. The enmity that we, the human race, put between ourselves and God by our constant rebellion has been dissolved by the overwhelming act of Jesus' love for his Father. The love of Christ surpasses the disobedience and hostility of Adam, the human race, in which we all shared.

Paul also says that we have been justified or made righteous by Christ's death. Human righteousness, being right with God, is always dependent on God's own righteousness. God's righteousness is his fidelity to his promises to save. In fulfilling those promises, God is being true to himself and his word, and so is righteous. We are brought under that same righteousness by the fulfilment of the promises in Christ. So, we are already reconciled and justified, and will be saved by Christ's life.

Question:

If I have already been put right with God, can I just float along and leave it all to God?

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Gospel:

(Matthew 9.36-10.3)

The New Israel

Jesus was concerned about his people. He wanted to bring to them the Kingdom of his Father, so he set out to heal them, and sent others out to do the same. His aim was to bring them the peace of God, to help them by ridding them of their worries, their sickness, their embarrassment at being lost sheep without a shepherd (God was always the shepherd in Israel).

When he set up the 12 apostles, he was making a New Israel, a new set of 12 tribes, as a permanent healing body, to make sure that the Kingdom of the Father and its peace and generosity would always be available. He was not setting up a clergy, a set of leaders, but appointing his own helpers in spreading God's Kingdom.

That is what every Christian must do. Do I make it my business to spread the Kingdom or the Kingship of God? Am I a labourer in the harvest, trying to bring God's peace and healing to all the sick sheep? After all, I was made in the image of God, and God gave me the task of following on his creative work. And then Jesus called me, too, to work with him.

Question:

Am I supposed to cure the sick and cast out devils?
