

Reflection for March 19, 2018

Mary was about 14 or 15 years old when the Angel Gabriel appeared to her and announced that she would conceive by the Holy Spirit and bear the Son of God. What made her agree to do that? In those times, as a single woman, she could be stoned for conceiving a child. Mary had faith in God and faith in his promises.

Throughout the old and new testaments the same theme emerges - have faith in God and his promises. We see how faith is passed down from each generation to the next and we imitate this in our lives as we teach our children. Our faith is a great gift from God and the promise to us is that this gift will be given to each generation.

I grew up as second of five children. My mother's sister "adopted" my older sister and I as she had never married and had no children. She was our second mother. Auntie Nellie was a Catholic elementary school principal who loved to teach and loved her Catholic faith. She went to Mass every day, was a devout member of the Legion of Mary and loved music. We spent many days hiking across the Scottish hills, singing hymns and songs and listening to the stories about the history of our faith and the saints who preserved the faith through the centuries. As we came upon a beautiful tree or a clear stream to stop for a drink, we thanked God for such gifts. When we stumbled and stubbed a toe or banged an elbow we were asked to "offer it up," for the holy souls in purgatory. Our lives were lived through the lens of our faith.

Some years ago, I worked at a company that was going through some major changes. My associate who had the office next to mine was teaching his staff about new processes and they were resisting the change. Each day when he reached the limit of his frustration he would come to my office, throw up his hands in the air and shout, "Take me now Jesus!"

Life has its ups and downs and things around us may change but our faith goes on through the ages; the faith we pass on to our children; the faith that was passed down to us. One thing I know for sure, I find I am happiest when I am around people of faith; people who believe in Jesus Christ and his promises, especially my parish family. There is a feeling of peace and joy. And, we are told that this is only a shadow of what heaven will be and what God has prepared for those who love him. Paradise.

Take me now Jesus! Yet your will not mine be done.

In Christ,

Joan Hurley

Reflection for March 20, 2018

Today's reading from the Book of Numbers is a good one for Lent. How often do we come to Friday abstinence counting the weeks until we can have pizza with meat again, or that juicy hamburger and fries? Just imagine what it must have been like for the Jews leaving behind the fresh fruits, vegetables and meats of Egypt to travel through the desert sands with nothing but manna bread. Instead of being grateful that food was being provided for them, they asked for more.

We hunger for things we cannot have and rarely appreciate what we do have. Most of us have a job, a house to live and a car to drive. And, how often do we wish we had a better job, a bigger house, a newer car, more vacation time and more money to do what we want to do? It is all too easy to focus on what we don't have instead of being grateful for what we do have.

When I first came to America I was amazed at how much the average American family had in terms of wealth and assets. I grew up in a very poor area. We had no phone or car and food was not plentiful. I had never tasted peanut butter or pumpkin and corn was something you could order at a restaurant or buy in a small tin at the grocery store. My first visit to my husband's family was a large family gathering. Large bowls overflowing with corn on the cob were placed on the table. Back then in Scotland corn on the cob was a rare treat normally in a restaurant. I remember telling my mother how they simply went outside to the garden to get more when the bowl was empty. I couldn't believe my eyes.

We rarely appreciate what we have until we see what others don't have or until what we have is taken away.

Lord, thank you for the many gifts you give us and for forgiving our ungrateful ways.

In Christ,

Joan Hurley

Reflections for March 21, 2018

“Whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father.” Matthew 10:33. In the old testament story of Shadrach, Meschack and Abednigo we see a parallel message; there is one God to whom we swear allegiance and must not deny before others.

Do we keep Christ front and center in our lives or do we deny Him by our actions?

This makes me think of the times when I have been with friends during Lent and they make fun of “you Catholics.” It would be easy to take the path of least resistance, break the fast, join the fun and begin again tomorrow. Have you ever been on vacation with non-Catholic friends who challenge you because you take time out to go to Mass on Sunday? Again, it would be easy to back down and not hold everyone up while you go off to Mass. How often are you having fun with friends when the topic of religion is brought up and the Catholic faith is criticized? How often do you miss Mass on a Holyday because you work late or decide to go to a sports event instead?

There are so many ways to deny God before others.

During the Irish Potato Famine in the mid-1800’s Ireland was part of Great Britain. The majority of people were Catholic, but they were shunned by the Scots and English overseers who were non-Catholics. Catholics were not emancipated until 1832 in Britain. The Irish people were starving and suffering from “Green Mouth” because they were eating grass. Some non-Catholic churches offered soup to their congregations and to Catholics who would deny their faith, come to their service and take communion with them. Catholics left Ireland in droves and came to America. Like Shadrach, Meschack and Abednego, many refused to deny their faith and either left the country or died from starvation.

Our actions invariably speak much louder than our words.

In Christ,
Joan Hurley

Reflections for March 22, 2018

In the first reading today we hear that God makes a covenant with Abram and changes his name to Abraham. The name Abram means "high father" and when changed to Abraham means "father of a multitude." When God changes a name it is to form a new identity with that person and their calling. Each time the new name is used that person recalls their purpose.

God makes changes to others throughout the Old Testament. Sarai (princess) was changed to Sarah (mother of nations.) Jacob (supplanter) was changed to Israel (having power with God.)

God forms the relationship with Abraham by establishing a covenant with him and all his descendants after him. He promises Abraham a son and asks him to circumcise himself and his people; the sign of God's covenant. God gives Abraham the lands of Canaan, nations, descendants and the everlasting pact that he will be their God. A Covenant is a binding promise. The Covenants of the bible unfold God's promises up to the New Covenant which God makes in Jesus.

Just as Abram's name was changed, so was Peter's. Simon comes from the name Simeon meaning "God has heard." Jesus changes his name to Peter, meaning rock. "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church." Matthew 16:18. The Apostle Paul had two names. Saul was his Hebrew name and Paul his Roman name. He began using his Roman name when he believed in Christ and it is thought because he then preached to the Gentiles.

The new covenant is established by Christ, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you," Luke 22:20. This new covenant is the forgiveness of sin through Christ. "Behold the days are coming says the Lord when I will conclude a new covenant ... I will put my laws in their minds and I will write them upon their hearts. I will be their God and they shall be my people." Hebrews 8:7-10.

In Christ,
Joan Hurley

Reflections for March 23, 2018

In Jeremiah the prophet we see a foreshadowing of Christ. Jeremiah is mocked, arrested, thrown in prison and publicly disgraced. Jeremiah is called by God to warn the people that if they don't reform their ways their own wickedness will chastise them, and their own infidelities punish them.

"For as numerous as your cities are your gods, O Judah! And as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up for Baal." Jer. 2:28.

Jeremiah dutifully delivers his message, but the people turn away. They continue to worship false Gods and ignore Jeremiah. In this reading today, you can sense Jeremiah's frustration. Even his friends turn against him. Jeremiah's anger is seen as he prays *"Let me witness the vengeance you take on them for to you I have entrusted my cause."* Jer. 20:12. Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 and the people exiled in Babylon.

In the gospel reading Jesus is having the same problem. He has just healed the blind man and has told them that he is the Good Shepherd. The people don't believe him. Even though he has performed many miracles and they have seen the great works he has done, they still doubt he is the Son of God. The Jews are divided on whether he is a demon or the Messiah.

Jesus is walking in the temple area when the Jews gather around him and press him to tell them whether he is the Messiah or not. Jesus tells them that they should believe because of the works he has done. If they don't believe him they should believe he is from God because of the works. But, they want him to be the great leader they think he should be who will lead them to defeat the Romans. Jesus tells them, *"The works I do in my Father's name testify to me. But you do not believe, because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice; I know them and they follow me."* Jn 10:25-27 His message does not suit them. They pick up stones to kill him because they say he has blasphemed.

When I go back to Scotland to visit my family and see the fields full of sheep, I am always reminded of the passage about the Good Shepherd and I look for the sheepfold and the gate. Are we one of Christ's sheep? Do we know him?

In Christ,
Joan Hurley