

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Genesis 18:1-10a

The first book of the Bible derives its name from the Greek rendering of chapter 2, verse 4: “these are the generations (*genesis*) of the heavens and the earth.” Tradition has it that Moses is the author – that is, he wrote down the oral traditions which had been passed down through the preceding centuries.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis recount such events as the creation of the earth, the flood, and the Tower of Babel. It is not until we get to the twelfth chapter that we are able to place a date on the events recounted with any certainty. Abram was called by God to journey to Canaan about 1850 B.C.. At that time Abram was 75 years old and God made him three promises of blessing; promises which were later solemnized by covenants: A nation, made a covenant in Genesis 15, and fulfilled in Moses; a name (dynasty, kingdom), made a covenant in Genesis 17:1-19, and fulfilled in David; and a worldwide blessing, made a covenant in Genesis 22 and fulfilled in Jesus the Christ. It was with Abram becoming Abraham, the father of all nations, at the making of the second covenant, that men and women began to rely upon God in faith and are changed by it. For today’s reading we join Abraham shortly after his name change. Abraham is 99 years old and he, along with all male members of his household, has just been circumcised.

18:1 The LORD appeared to Abraham by the terebinth

A terebinth is a small tree native to the Mediterranean region that yields a resinous liquid. It is sometimes called a “terpentine tree.” Other translations show “oaks,” a shade tree which is large.

of Mamre,

The meaning is uncertain, but Mamre is thought to be a place near Hebron. It is associated with Abraham (in this reading), Isaac (in Genesis 35:27), and Jacob. To the east of Mamre is the cave in which were buried Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, and Jacob. This site is now located in Hebron and is a mosque. Recently (several years ago) this mosque was shot up by a Jewish settler. The site is believed to have been a place of sanctuary in ancient times.

as he sat in the entrance of his tent, while the day was growing hot. ² Looking up, he saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them; and bowing to the ground,

Oriental hospitality demanded this action – it is nothing more than common courtesy.

³ he said: “Sir,

Literally, “my lord” – a common courteous greeting.

if I may ask you this favor, please do not go on past your servant. ⁴ Let some water be brought, that you may bathe your feet, and then rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵ Now that you have come this close to your servant, let me bring you a little food, that you may refresh yourselves; and afterward you may go on your way.” “Very well,” they replied, “do as you have said.” ⁶ Abraham hastened into the tent and told Sarah, “Quick, three seahs of fine flour!

3 *seahs* = 1 bushel

Knead it and make rolls.” ⁷ He ran to the herd, picked out a tender, choice steer, and gave it to a servant, who quickly prepared it. ⁸ Then he got some curds

Used to make cheese. Cottage cheese is strained and seasoned curds of skim milk.

and milk, as well as the steer that had been prepared, and set these before them; and he waited on them under the tree while they ate. ⁹ “Where is your wife Sarah?” they asked him. “There in the tent,” he replied. ^{10a} One of them said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah will then have a son.”

This is the same promise made to Abraham by God in Genesis 17:6. Abraham’s reaction is to laugh (Genesis 17:17). Immediately following our reading today, Sarah laughs at the news (Genesis 18:12). The child born was named Isaac, which means “laughter”.

2nd Reading - Colossians 1:24-28

Last week we started our study of the Letter to the Colossians. Recall that Paul was using this occasion to answer the Judaizers and remind them of the absolute supremacy of Jesus the Christ. Today Paul tells us his role in proclaiming the gospel.

²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church,

Interpreters have debated two issues related to this phrase: 1) The meaning of filling up what is lacking; and 2) The meaning of the sufferings of Christ. It does not mean that Christ’s work was somehow insufficient. The word *thilipsis* translated here as “sufferings” is never used to describe Christ’s passion, but it is used regularly to describe the hardships of those proclaiming the gospel. Paul’s vocation as an apostle is to complete the preaching of the gospel by bringing the Good News to places where Christ has never been preached. My personal interpretation (not Church dogma): The Church is the Body of Christ. We are united to Him through the Eucharist at the 3rd cup of the Passover meal and we are called to live out His life every day (just recall what He did between the Upper Room and Calvary) until we drink the 4th

cup with Him in heaven. Suffering is necessary because it purifies and focuses, and persecution is a reward for discipleship.

“In regard to this is that which in another place the very same apostle says: ‘I now rejoice in sufferings for you, and I fill up those things which are wanting of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh.’ He did not say ‘of the afflictions of me’ but ‘of Christ,’ because he was a member of Christ and in his persecutions, such as it was necessary for Christ to suffer in His whole body, even Paul was filling up Christ’s afflictions in Paul’s own portion.” [Saint Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 416), *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 108,5,1]

²⁵ of which I am a minister in accordance with God’s stewardship given to me to bring to completion for you the word of God, ²⁶ the mystery hidden from ages and from generations past.

God’s divine plan for the world – that it is reconciled to Him through His Son. It is called a mystery because it is far beyond our comprehension and could never be understood without divine assistance.

But now it has been manifested to his holy ones, ²⁷ to whom God chose to make known

The revelation of the mystery is from God.

the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; it is Christ in you, the hope for glory.

In Colossians there is only one mention of the Holy Spirit (Colossians 1:8) and it is generic and vague. Rather, it is the Risen Christ Himself who performs the functions attributed to the Spirit in the other epistles.

“And with reason he calls that a mystery, which none knew except God. And from where hid? In Christ; as he says in the Epistle to the Ephesians (3:9). ... But now it has been manifested, he says, ‘to his holy ones.’ So we know that it is altogether of the dispensation of God. ‘But now it has been manifested,’ he says. He does not say ‘is come to pass’ but ‘has been manifested to his holy ones.’ So that it is even now still hid, since it has been manifested to his holy ones alone.” [Saint John Chrysostom (ca. A.D. 400), *Homilies on the Epistle to the Colossians* 5]

²⁸ It is he whom we proclaim, admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

The mystery is not a secret revealed to a few privileged initiates, as in pagan mystery religions, but it is destined for the whole world. There are no limitations.

Gospel - Luke 10:38-42

Last week we heard the parable of the good Samaritan. Shocking because the Samaritans were considered by the Jews to be even lesser than the pagans – although the

Samaritans also worshiped the same God as did the Jews. Today again we hear of Jesus acting contrary to Jewish cultural norms in three ways: He is alone with women who are not his relatives, He is being served by a woman, and He is teaching a woman in her own house.

38 As they continued their journey he entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him.

The name "Martha" means "lady", a feminine form of "lord."

39 She had a sister named Mary

Not to be confused with Mary of Magdala. She is one of seven different Marys in the New Testament.

(who) sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak.

The posture of a disciple (see Luke 8:35; Acts 22:3).

40 Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me." 41 The Lord said to her in reply, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. 42 There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her."

The followers of Jesus need to listen to His word.

This reading again gives us a lesson on prayer. Martha approaches the Lord with a problem and the solution she wants to that problem, and the answer she receives is not the one she wanted. Mary, Jesus' mother, on the other hand at the wedding feast at Cana pointed out the problem to Jesus and left it up to Him to work out the solution.