

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes February 20, 2008

Ephesians 4: 25 - 5:2 (Part 4)

- 25: Therefore, putting away falsehood,
let every one speak the truth with his neighbor,
for we are members one of another.
- 26: Be angry but do not sin;
do not let the sun go down on your anger,
- 27: and give no opportunity to the devil.
- 28: Let the thief no longer steal,
but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands,
so that he may be able to give to those in need.
- 29: Let no evil talk come out of your mouths,
but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion,
that it may impart grace to those who hear.
- 30: And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,
in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
- 31: Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander
be put away from you, with all malice,
- 32: and be kind to one another, tenderhearted,
forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.
- 1: Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.
- 2: And walk in love,
as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us,
a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Introduction: Lent is the period of the Liturgical year in which we are called to examine our lives, our relationships, our hearts, to root out sin and bad habits, bad attitudes, anything that stands in the way of us being what Christ calls us to be. We do this through this the traditional / Scriptural acts of piety--prayer, fasting, and alms giving--but undergirding these acts must be hearts and minds centered on renewal. The acts of piety cannot change us without a heart felt conviction to change. And the place where the proverbial "rubber meets the road" in this Lenten renewal is in our relationships with one another. The acts of piety make no difference if we don't get along with our neighbors. This is what we'll discuss today on Deep in Scripture.

House cleaning items...

- Website, book special: "**Hidden Power of Kindness,**" by Fr. Lawrance Lavasik
- We want your input!!! Phone: 740-450-1175
Email: marcus@deepinscripture.com
Forum: <http://www.chnetwork.org/forums/forum51>

REVIEW:

- During Lent, we are called to examine our relationship with Jesus Christ and His Church. Essentially, how faithfully are we living out our baptismal promises? This is essentially what the book of Ephesians is about: the first three chapters summarize what happens when we have been baptized and received into the Church: our relationships with God, with other baptized believers, and with our selves has been changed by grace: we have been saved from our former alienation from God,

others, and ourselves, by grace through faith.

- Then in chapters 4-6, St. Paul describes how the newly baptized are to continue living out their new lives in Christ: living out the changes that have happened by grace, as well as carrying out the promises they made when they were baptized.
- St. Hilary of Poitiers, a Bishop and Doctor of the Church, lived from 315-368. He was born into a noble and probably pagan family. He was instructed in all the branches of profane learning, but, having also taken up the study of Holy Scripture and ardently seeking the truth that he found there, he renounced idolatry and was baptized. So he had a certain affinity for newly baptized Gentile pagan believers to whom St. Paul was writing in Ephesians. Eventually St. Hilary was ordained a priest and then bishop and is remembered for his defense against the Arian heresy. In St. Hilary's copious writings, we find this prayer, which expresses what St. Paul was trying to encourage in Ephesians:

"O Lord, deliver us from futile battles of words, and assist us in professing the truth. Keep us steadfast in faith, a genuine and unadulterated faith. Enable us to remain faithful to what we promised when we were baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Let us have you as our Father, and continue to live in your Son and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit." (Quoted from the New Saint Joseph's People's Prayer Book, Catholic Book Publishing Co., pg. 359.)

- From the beginning, the enemies of the Faith—the world, the flesh, and the devil—have tried to undercut & destroy the witness of baptized believers: by dividing us through the futile battle of words and ideas, and then distracting us away from living out our baptismal promises. We forget who we are in Christ and what he has done for us! This is what Lent and what the book of Ephesians is about.
- In chapter 4, St. Paul addresses the Church in Ephesus:

"And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles."

- St. Paul explains that the unity & diversity of the Church were established with the goal of helping the baptized members grow in faithful unity and the fulness of union with Christ. But, as St. Hilary attests in the 4th century, and as each of us can still attest today, the battle still rages on: well-meaning, sincere believers are yet still "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men." New independent churches following new charismatic preachers proclaiming new and improved dogmas spring up nearly every day, answerable to no one and unapologetically disconnected from historic Christianity.
- Yet the answer St. Paul gave to this cacaphony of conflicting voices was not for you or I to go off and start our own "more faithful, more Biblical church," but rather to look into our own hearts, for it is always here that renewal must begin. Recognizing the authority of the Church that our Lord Jesus established in his "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers," St. Paul calls us, in verses 22-24, to:

*Put off your old nature
which belongs to your former manner of life
and is corrupt through deceitful lusts,
and be renewed in the spirit of your minds,
and put on the new nature,
created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

- Renewal, which is what Lent is all about, begins with examining where we are, right now, with Jesus our Lord and with His Church, not just in relation to the doctrines, practices, and hierarchy of the Church, but in our relations with our brothers and sisters in faith. Where are we in our love with God and neighbor?

To assist us in this self-examination, St. Paul, gave some “Rules” for getting along within the Body.

- These can serve as marching orders for how we are to deal with conflict, or they can also serve as points for self-examination: **How to I stack up when I am in conflict with others?**
- **Two Preliminary Assumptions (plus one):**
 - Disagreements are sometimes necessary or at least unavoidable (4:26a)**
 - “**Be angry...!**” -- possibly a concessive imperative: (“Be angry, if you must.”)
 - But we must be careful!**
 - “**Be angry but do not sin**”
 - **Just because our anger may be justified does not necessarily justify anger!**
 - We need to separate anger from emotions, like charity & forgiveness!
 - Uncontrolled anger can lead to sin, which grieves God! **(4:30)**
 - These “rules” are to help us deal with disagreements constructively.
 - Behind St. Paul’s writings are at least three sources:**
 - Old Testament Scripture;
 - The Teachings of Christ passed down by His Apostles;
 - St. Paul’s oral teaching & preaching.

The “Rules” for Getting along:

- I offer these recognizing, just like St. Paul, that I am certainly not perfect yet!
 - I know these rules...but I also know how difficult it is to live them out;
 - The enemies (the world, the flesh, & the devil) constantly fight against our willingness to bring our lives in line with God;
- And so these “rules,” are guidelines & goals for us to follow in grace.

1. Keep it HONEST! (4:25)

*“Therefore, putting away falsehood,
let every one speak the truth with his neighbor,
for we are members one of another.”*

- Missunderstandings, misinformation, misscommunication, rumors, gossip, prejudice, any kind of falsehood hinders our ability to get along.
- **Here St. Paul calls us to be honest in our relationships:**
 - **Identify & put off falsehood in our attitudes;**
 - **Speak the truth with one another:**
 - This involves remembering what he said earlier: (15)
“Speak the truth in love.”
 - And separating “truth” from “opinion.”
 - **Honest communication requires humility!**

2. Keep it IN CONTROL! (4:26a, 31a)

1st: “Be angry but do not sin...”

- This is a quote from Psalm 4, in which the psalmist recognizing that there are many

around him who rail at God because God hasn't responded to them the way they wanted or expected: their anger at God has become sin.

- "Why, God, don't you reward us the way you used to do?!"
- The Psalmist, on the other hand, may also be angry at God for the same reason, yet his "anger" is tempered by his trust, his thanksgiving, his joy. He remembers how God acted & why, and trusts!
- By quoting this Psalm, St. Paul is reminding us to treat each other with the same respect & love, even when we have legitimate complaints!

2nd: "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor ... be put away from you..."

- These attitudes / vices feed justified anger, like armloads of dry wood on a fire, reducing any possibility of honest and controlled communication;
- We must not hold on with **bitterness** to the hurts of the past, we are not to let our **anger** morph into outbursts of shouting, or emotional fury, as if we have the right to express the **wrath** of God!
- Rather, we are to **put "all"** these attitudes "**away from**" us, which involves a wilful choice & act, regardless of how we feel.

3. Keep it FRESH! (4:26b)

"...do not let the sun go down on your anger..."

- A very tough one!
 - Remember: not talking about emotions but how we express ourselves:
 - We can't force our emotions to go away!
 - Rather, if we can, it's good to discuss how we're feeling;
- He is also, however, encouraging us not to let it smolder but deal with it now:
 - If there is something wrong, then don't hesitate or procrastinate, but go to the appropriate person / authority and deal with it (by the rules!).
- Once again, we hear behind St. Paul the teaching of Christ:
Mt 6:34, "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day."

4. Keep it CENTERED ON FORGIVENESS! (4:28, 32b)

**1st: "Let the thief no longer steal,
but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands,
so that he may be able to give to those in need."**

- St. Paul inserts this, not so much as a warning to former thieves to now be productive, but rather to the rest of us, to let them forget the past and move on in their new lives:
 - Don't hold the mistakes of other people's past against them!
 - Don't lift yourself up as better, but stand beside them as equals!
 - Why? Because of what St. Paul says in verse 32...

2nd: "...forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

- In other words, all of our communications / anger must be guided by the underlying precepts of our faith: we have been saved and forgiven and love by grace, not because we deserve it; so we are to do the same for others!
- This again brings us back to the Sermon on the Mount:

5. Keep it **POSITIVE!**(4:29, 32a)

**1st: “Let no evil talk come out of your mouths,
but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion,
that it may impart grace to those who hear.”**

- **Again, the teaching from the Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5:21-22,**

“You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be liable to the hell of fire.

- Here Jesus is both reinterpreting and reapplying the historic teaching that God gave to His people: anger turned to sin, through bitterness, wrath, clamor, etc., is equivalent to murder, and so we must control our tongue!

- **St. James echoes the same warnings in his letter:**

1:19-21, “Know this, my beloved brethren. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

1: 26, “If any one thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man’s religion is vain.”

2:23, “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.”

3: 1-10, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness. For we all make many mistakes, and if any one makes no mistakes in what he says he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also. If we put bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Look at the ships also; though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is an unrighteous world among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the cycle of nature, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by humankind, but no human being can tame the tongue -- a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brethren, this ought not to be so.

- **We are commanded to take charge of what comes out of our mouths, for here St. Paul is merely reinforcing what Jesus warned the Pharisees in Matthew 12: 36-37,**

“I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

2nd: “...and be kind to one another, tenderhearted...”

- Just think of how differently our relationships would be if we always consciously tried, by grace, to do this--to always speak from kindness, and being tenderhearted rather than hard-hearted.

6. Keep it **PRIVATE!** (4:31b)

“Let all ... slander be put away from you, with all malice...”

- Basically a continuation of what he has been saying, yet also a warning to keep our conflict on topic, to not switch to character assassination, and essentially a warning to keep the conflict private.

- Jesus once gave strict rules for dealing with conflict in the Church, His body: Mt 18:15-18, *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

7. Keep it **CLEANED UP!** (5:1-2)

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

- Our relationships within the Body are to mirror who we are now by baptism:
 - We are now born again by baptism and **beloved Children of God**;
 - We are, therefore, by grace, to **imitate our Father in Heaven**;
 - Which means, therefore, that we are to **walk in Love**.
 - But what does this mean? What kind of love?
 - Here St. Paul clearly builds on the command of Jesus Christ, when he said in John 15:12-14, *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you."*
 - Our relationships are to mirror His relationship with us.

As we examine ourselves during this time of Lent, how do our communication techniques match up to those given here by St. Paul?

- When we find ourselves in conflict with others, how well do we:
 1. Keep it **HONEST!** (4:25)
 2. Keep it **IN CONTROL!** (4:26a, 31a)
 3. Keep it **FRESH!** (4:26b)
 4. Keep it **CENTERED ON FORGIVENESS!** (4:28, 32b)
 5. Keep it **POSITIVE!**(4:29, 32a)
 6. Keep it **PRIVATE!** (4:31b)
 7. Keep it **CLEANED UP!** (5:1-2)
- May the Lord give us the grace this Lent to face up to our failures, to our destructive attitudes and habits, to the ways we let our emotions control our actions and words, to the ways we have not loved one another as Christ has loved us, so that by His grace we can turn back fully to God in humility and "put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."