

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

^{34:1} Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the LORD showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan, ² all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, ³ the Negeb, and the Plain -- that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees -- as far as Zoar. ⁴ The LORD said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there." ⁵ Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command. ⁶ He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. ⁷ Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigor had not abated. ⁸ The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended. ⁹ Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the LORD had commanded Moses. ¹⁰ Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. ¹¹ He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, ¹² and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

Commentary

Today's lection brings to a conclusion the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, as well as the life of Moses, the greatest of Israel's prophets. Given only a glimpse of the land he would not be allowed to enter, Moses is silent throughout the passage and throughout the final encounter with God. His presence, however, was powerful even in death. As Joshua took up the role of leader and the people prepared to enter Canaan, the memory of Moses would continue with them. In his humanness, Moses fell short of God's command. He is remembered, however, as a model of faithful service—as one deeply loved by God, whose justice was always executed with compassion and mercy.

Reflection

Do we respond to the consequences of our failings with renewed faith and commitment, or by placing the blame on God?

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

^{2:1} You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, ² but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. ³ For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵ As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; ⁶ nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, ⁷ though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. ⁸ So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

Commentary

A striking difference between Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians and his later epistles is the absence of the assertion of his authenticity as an apostle. In his evangelistic efforts among the Gentile believers of Thessalonica, however, he emphasized the personal relationship he and his colleagues had developed with the new Christians—a relationship that, in essence, defines what it means to be an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Reflection

What defines being an apostle or disciple of Christ to you?

Matthew 22:34-46

^{22:34} When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵ and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" ³⁷ He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." ⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: ⁴² "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." ⁴³ He said to them, "How is it then that

David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, ⁴⁴ 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"'? ⁴⁵ If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" ⁴⁶ No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Commentary

Once again, the Pharisees devised a trap for Jesus. He had just finished a similar encounter with the Sadducees concerning marriage in the resurrection. Citing the requirements of the law, the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, described a widow who had in turn married each of her husband's six brothers. Jesus responded by quoting from Exodus, thereby silencing him. The Pharisees then decided upon the ultimate question: "Which commandment in the law is the greatest?". The lawyer, knowing that there were 613 separate commandments, was sure that this question would be Jesus' downfall. His answer, however, again silenced his opposition, and also gave those willing to listen insight into the nature of his messiahship.

Reflection

What does it mean to love God wholly? Could loving God with all our heart, soul and mind help us to love others—and our self—more completely?

Responsive Psalter

Psalms 90:1-6, 13-17

^{90:1} Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

² Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

³ You turn us back to dust, and say, "Turn back, you mortals."

⁴ For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.

⁵ You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning;

⁶ in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.

^{90:13} Turn, O LORD! How long? Have compassion on your servants!

¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

¹⁵ Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us, and as many years as we have seen evil.

¹⁶ Let your work be manifest to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.

¹⁷ Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands -- O prosper the work of our hands!

Closing Prayer

Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.