

Newsletter for February 2023

Dear Friends in Christ:

The Gospel texts for Year A in the lectionary are predominantly texts from Matthew's Gospel.

The Season after Epiphany gives us a series of texts that reveal who Jesus is and what he is about.

In January, He was baptized in the Jordan. He was approved by the Father as his Son and anointed with the Holy Spirit. (1-8)

He was recognized by John the Baptist as "the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. (1-15)

He called Andrew and Simon, James and John and they immediately left everything and followed him.

He begins a ministry of healing and restoration of individuals who are the victims of life on earth. (1-22)

He announces the following to the losers of life's lottery.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5:5 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

5:7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

5:10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (1-29)

And that is just January.

In February, he tells his followers they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world and exhorts them to lives of righteousness and holiness. (Feb. 5)

He prohibits anger, lust and deception. (Feb. 12)

On the Mount of Transfiguration he is shown to his disciples in his full glory and God affirms him as his Son and tells the disciples, "Listen to him." (Feb. 19)

We could go on with who Jesus is and who he calls us to be, but Easter must be observed according to the Alexandrian formula, which means the 40 days of Lent (not counting Sundays) must begin.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday which is February 22.

In Lent, we focus on what we have become (sin) in order that it be necessary for Jesus to be crucified for us and for our salvation. The modern formula, "He paid a debt he did not owe for us who had a debt we could not pay," gets it just about right.

In Paul's terse shorthand, he writes, God..."made him to be sin who knew no sin in order that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21)

In Lent we look at our sin not with detachment, as though it was really someone else who did all those bad things, nor with excuse making, but with existential engagement and self-loathing: "O wretched man I am! Who will deliver me out of this body of death?" (Romans 7:24)

Once we have explored and owned the central problem with who we have become, we are ready for the answer to the above question of who will deliver me... the answer given in Romans 7:25: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord". The answer comes on Good Friday and on Easter.

Yours in Christ,

JSM