

3 Lent – Year C – March 10, 2010 - Homily
Exodus 3:1-15; Psalm 63: 1-8; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9
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Here's a 'mom' story that I think we can all relate to from a woman called Heidi Potter. "Standing in the kitchen one day, I dropped something very large and very heavy on my foot. I confess, the word that popped out of my mouth was not a nice one. It became even less nice when my [three] year old ran around repeating it. Loudly. It was then that the reality actually hit me. When [we] decided to have a baby, we knew that everything we did and said affected this baby. But at that moment, with my daughter running around the house sounding not-so-sugar-and-spice, I finally got it. She is watching every little thing I do. She listens for every word that comes out of my mouth...." Exasperated, Heidi goes on to ponder the implications. "An example?! Is that what I am to be for the rest of my life? Yes, it is. The day I became a parent, I willingly submitted myself to be an example of all sorts. When I sweep the floor, my daughter is watching me and learning. ... When I say a bad word, my daughter is listening. Later in life it will be much more subtle.... If I blow off church, she's going to think it's okay and that church is not a big deal. If I watch something on TV that I tell her isn't appropriate, what am I saying to her? Do as I say, not as I do."

Paul is writing to the Corinthians because he too is exasperated by their behavior. Corinth was quite the cosmopolitan city, and one that was full of temptations for the members of this fledgling Christian community. Many of them saw nothing incongruous about eating at the Lord's Table on the Sabbath, and then eating meat dedicated to one of the many pagan gods of that culture and time. They did not understand that when some of their ancestors – the people chosen to be in covenant with God – indulged in sexual immorality in the same way as their pagan neighbors that it was, and remains, displeasing to God. These temptations lead us to break covenantal relations with God. Paul is warning the Corinthians not to test Christ, but by indulging in idolatrous practices, that is precisely what they are doing. They are also allowing history to repeat itself by desiring evil instead of the goodness and love of God in Christ Jesus. You and I still face similar temptations that can lead us away from God. At ground level, each of these errors amounts to our own struggles with the desire to be in charge, and the temptation to act purely from our own strength, without the discipline of self-control. And when we get down to the real nitty-gritty, our fall into sinfulness is about a lack of humility.

The word humility is rooted in the Latin word *humus*. The gardeners amongst us will immediately recognize name humus as the good organic material that helps to enrich the soil filling it with nutrients. The link between the ground of our being and humility reminds us of Ash Wednesday, when we hear the words, "remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Believing that we are sufficient in and of ourselves to stand alone is a sure sign that we are in trouble. It usually means that we are about to find ourselves flat on our faces, or at least sitting down hard as if someone pulled the chair right out from under us. The truth is we are dependent on God, and are part of a community that is in covenant with God. Just as Moses and the Israelites were called into covenant, we too are children of a covenant. Baptism is the central rite in which we are welcomed into the new covenant community in Christ. So what does it mean to be in a covenant relationship?

There are multiple covenants described for us in the Hebrew Scriptures – the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant – yet at the heart of each is the idea of

relationship and partnership with God. Under the Old Covenant, the faithful response of the Israelites to God's promises is to obey God's commandments and refrain from idolatry. In the new covenant, God has blessed all the faithful who believe in Jesus Christ with the gift of everlasting life. For our part, we agree to love and worship God, and to follow the commandment of Jesus to love our neighbors as ourselves. Since the new covenant in Christ is a continuation of the divine relationship with God's people, we cannot neglect the Ten Commandments as irrelevant. Similarly, putting anything between ourselves and God in Christ – in other words practicing idolatry – is also destructive to that covenantal relationship. Living into our baptismal covenant transforms and moves us into a closer relationship with God through the Body of Christ. In our baptismal covenant, we promise to continue to grow in Christ through the reading of Scriptures, and prayer. We promise to resist evil, to repent, and return to the Lord whenever we fall into sin. We promise to proclaim the Good News of Christ through what we say and what we do, especially by serving others and working for justice and peace. Most importantly, we pledge that we will strive to fulfill each of these promises with God's help.

In the epistle to the Corinthians, we have Paul's interpretation of Judeo-Christian history, including the ancient Israelites' baptism through the Red Sea. Paul warns the early church, and he warns us too about the dangers of idolatry and self-sufficiency. His point is that if the Israelites could fail repeatedly despite such a close relationship with God, we too are just as susceptible to temptations. The idols may be different, but nonetheless we are surrounded by temptation. Our culture is filled with magazines and other media that openly promote sexuality as an end in itself. Television advertising and programming frequently engender the values of materialism and entitlement. And society has now redefined the American dream to be something like 'wealth is the ultimate measure of your success in life'. How do you and I as members of Christ's body live as part of this world, yet somehow find a way to resist the temptation to fall into line with cultural norms and do what everyone else is doing? How do we avoid being hypocrites by saying one thing and doing another?

Our hope lies in two directions. The first is knowing, really knowing, that with God all things are possible. The second lies in being part of a community of faith that practices what it values like the disciplines of prayer and worship. Amazing things happen when we pray. Prayer can humble us. Reminding us of our dependence on God, and filling us with gratitude to God for all our blessings. Prayer can also cultivate in us the fruit of the Spirit like love, patience and kindness. In community, we gather to share Holy Communion, and to worship the Lord. Holy Communion strengthens us to resist temptation. We are also blessed with the strength that comes from the support of our whole community of faith whenever we are struggling. When Paul uses the word "you" in his discussion of God's faithfulness in the face of temptations, it is the plural form. Through the community of faith, God provides us with an exit door, a way to endure whatever testing we are faced with. As members of the Body of Christ, we are here to love and help one another. Our hope is always in the Lord. You and I are formed and strengthened in our spiritual lives by our community of faith, and the spiritual disciplines we practice individually and together. Perhaps a measure of a faithful life in service to the Lord is one where we can all confidently say, "Do as I say, **and** do as I do".

Amen.