



Daily Reflections

MEMORIAL OF SAINT PAUL MIKI AND COMPANIONS, MARTYRS

By Sr. Christine Hilliard, CSJ

Earliest Christian Martyrs of Japan

In 1588 the Japanese emperor ordered all Christians out of Japan. (Fifty years earlier Christianity had been brought to Japan by Francis Xavier.) Some Christians disobeyed the emperor and stayed in the country to minister to the community there. Among these were Paul Miki and two other Jesuit priests, six Franciscan priests, and 17 other Christians who were carpenters, cooks, translators and catechists. Three who stayed behind were altar boys.

Some of the Christians were tortured and marched through the towns to caution anyone else who thought of disobeying the emperor. They were then placed on crosses and their sides were pierced. Paul Miki and his companions were the first Far East martyrs.

Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of the whole community of Israel, and stretching forth his hands toward heaven, he said, "LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below; you keep your covenant of mercy with your servants who are faithful to you with their whole heart.

"Can it indeed be that God dwells on earth? If the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain you, how much less this temple which I have built Look kindly on the prayer and petition of your servant, O LORD, my God, and listen to the cry of supplication which I, your servant, utter before you this day. May your eyes watch night and day over this temple, the place where you have decreed you shall be honored; may you heed the prayer which I, your servant, offer in this place. Listen to the petitions of your servant and of your people Israel which they offer in this place. Listen from your heavenly dwelling and grant pardon."

1 KINGS 8:22-23, 27-30

Reflection

The key question here is: "Can it indeed be that God dwells on earth?" Solomon continues: "If the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain you, how much less this temple which I have built!" In essence, the presence of the all-powerful God is not "containable," much less can it be located in "one place." And yet, God chooses to be available to humankind. The only response asked of humans is faithfulness, i.e., living acknowledgement that God is God alone.

What phrase from the first reading attracts you? How would you weave it into a prayer?

Can you think of any place where God is not present? If "yes," then where? (Have you ever been there?) If "no," list places where you have experienced God.



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Today's Gospel

When the Pharisees with some scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus, they observed that some of his disciples ate their meals with unclean, that is, unwashed, hands. (For the Pharisees and, in fact, all Jews, do not eat without carefully washing their hands, keeping the tradition of the elders. And on coming from the marketplace they do not eat without purifying themselves. And there are many other things that they have traditionally observed, the purification of cups and jugs and kettles and beds.) So the Pharisees and scribes questioned him, "Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but instead eat a meal with unclean hands?" He responded, "Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written:

This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts.

You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition." He went on to say, "How well you have set aside the commandment of God in order to uphold your tradition! For Moses said,

*Honor your father and your mother,
and Whoever curses father or mother shall die.*

Yet you say, 'If someone says to father or mother, "Any support you might have had from me is qorban"' (meaning, dedicated to God), you allow him to do nothing more for his father or mother. You nullify the word of God in favor of your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many such things."

MARK 7:1-13

Reflection

In this passage Jesus opposes legalism, not the Law. External customs are not meant to exclude people from the kingdom of God, which is intended to unite all creation. Be alert to God's instruction that includes all, and to human tradition that may subtly exclude others from the circle of God.

Has there ever been a time when you have felt excluded? What was your response?

Jesus accused the leaders of his faith community: "You nullify the word of God in favor of your tradition that you handed on." What might an example of this be in your faith community? What alternative might be offered?

Rather than disrespecting external rules, Jesus is focused on clarifying the power and place of *internal* realities of people. Clarifying the difference could create a unifying community of faith.

For Prayer

*How many times have I faced
what I perceived to be
impossible, hopeless situations
and withstood them ---
and discovered creative solutions
through which to surmount
and master them.
You've strengthened me
again and again.*

*I know that you
will never fail me.*

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