



Daily Reflections

JOURNEYING THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES

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WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

By Father David C. Robinson, SJ

Excerpts from Today's Readings

God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "See, I am now establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you: all the birds, and the various tame and wild animals that were with you and came out of the ark.... God added: "This is the sign that I am giving for all ages to come, of the covenant between me and you and every living creature with you: I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."

GENESIS 9:8-10, 12-13

Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They said in reply,

“John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets.” And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter said to him in reply, “You are the Christ.” Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him. He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days.

MARK 8:27-30

Reflection

From the earliest generations of the Hebrew people, as they followed the call of God under the leadership of Moses, theirs was a relationship of *covenant*. They were not simply a people of magical rites designed to elicit a positive response from the deities. Nor were they mere supplicants, trembling before the vagaries of a self-absorbed and vindictive god. Theirs was a connection born of devotion and reciprocity. They were God’s creation, and the chosen people he sought to sew the seed and cultivate the promised harvest of his walk with them. This covenant incorporated a fidelity to faith, ritual, justice, and a Law that helped to shape an identity sustained in love.

The history of this covenantal bond was far from tranquil. The vagaries of politics, economy, personal vanity, and lust for power often derailed the plan God had formed for Moses’ descendants, and decades of Exodus ensued. The path of communal growth in covenant continued after the death of Joshua, through the period of the Judges (including Gideon, Deborah, and Samson), and the kingship of Saul, David, Solomon, and beyond. The disruptive generations of Exile were a further purifying fire, refining the people’s vision of their God and their ultimate future. Even during the imperial rule of the Romans, and the Jewish quest to discover the Messiah of the people, Jesus incarnated the drama and the mystery of the ages-old covenant that linked God and humanity.

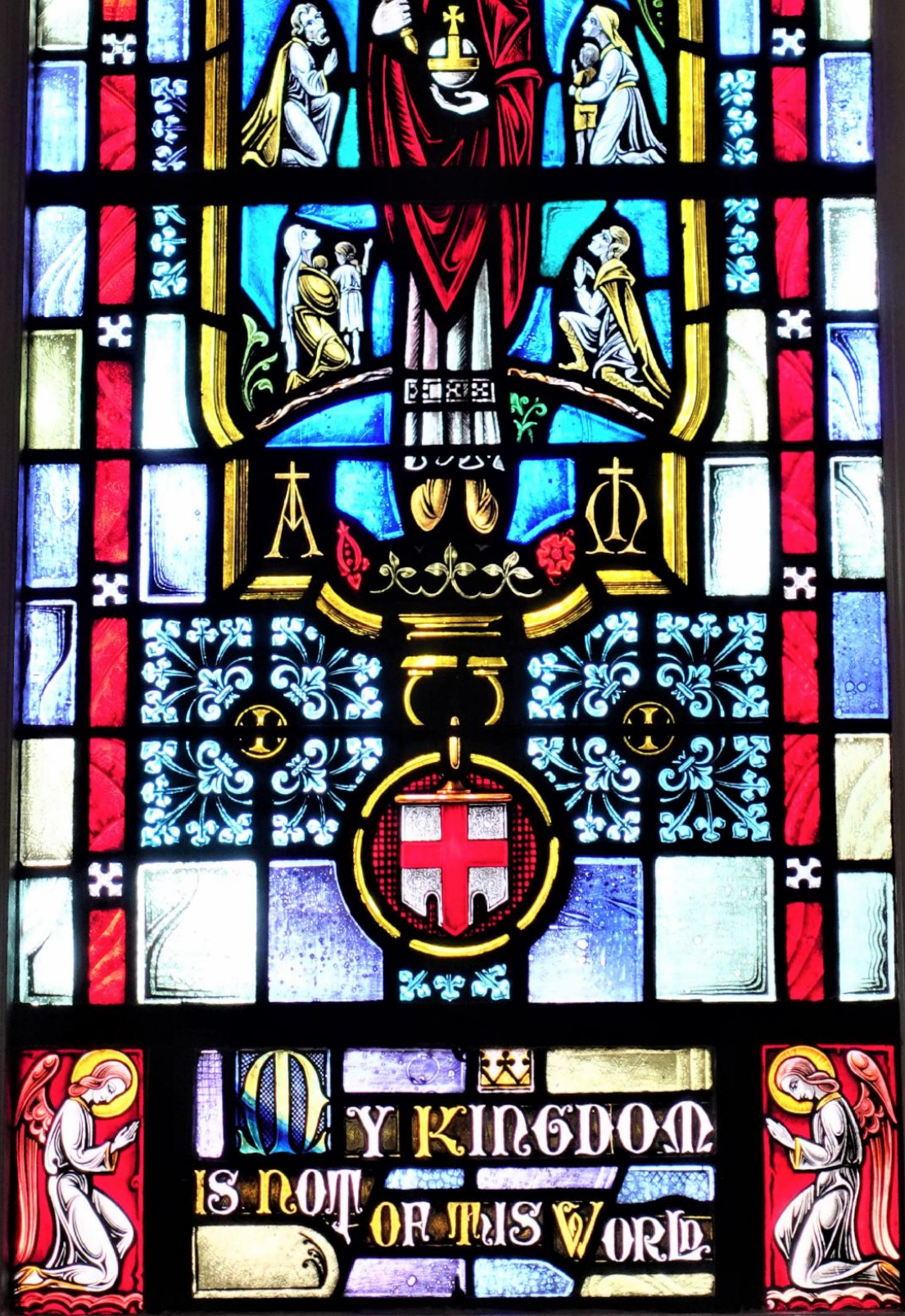
Today’s readings anchor this arc of history. The story of Noah derived from the earliest myths of the people in the first generations after Adam, long before the Mosaic adventure. The people had lost their connection to God, who decided to wash away the taint of their infidelity. Noah, as an honorable man and follower of God, was chosen to build and captain a great ship that would save a remnant of the whole created order during a great flood. When the floodwaters subsided, the world ‘began anew,’ and every living creature was folded once again into the embrace of God’s vision: **“This is the sign that I am giving for all ages to come, of the covenant between me and you and every**

living creature with you: I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”

With Peter’s declaration that Jesus is the Christ, the covenant came to fruition. Through the centuries, the Hebrews had sought the one who would bring the gift of freedom and justice. In Jesus, they encountered one who was not going to lead them into battle to overturn political and economic powers. His was a message of a Kingdom that dwelt within the spirit and faith of the people. The power for change was community and love, not violent resistance and destruction of the old order. Jesus did not embrace Peter’s words as an affirmation of worldly authority, but rather the authentic grounding of a New Creation in God: **Jesus asked them, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter said to him in reply, “You are the Christ.” Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him.** He admonished them to avoid making a public spectacle of his miracles. As messiah, he incarnated the loving presence and intentions of God. He was not a warrior seeking a circle of ideological devotees.

Throughout the centuries of growth in communal and institutional Christian life, we have often wrapped ourselves in patterns of religious and political control, that have dimmed the great light of Jesus’ teaching. We seem to prefer a messiah who ‘agrees with us’ in our politics, or our social ideals, not one who challenges us daily to take up the cross of compassion and mercy in the face of opposition. We are meant to be ministers of conversion, not condemnation. Perhaps during this upcoming Lenten season we might reflect on the ways we can live the messianic promise of God—to create a people of fidelity and faith, trusting in God’s promise of spiritual fulfillment, not merely our own designs for a ‘better world.’ The Messiah asks for nothing less.





Los Altos Retreat Center
Photo by Fr. David Robinson, SJ

For Pondering

- How would you explain the role of the Messiah in Christian life?
- What do you consider to be the unique qualities of Jesus as the Messiah of God?

- How would you envision a Messiah for the '21st Century'?

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