

given for this promise is the people's fear of experiencing God directly. Although the promise is to be granted, it comes with a price for the prophet and the people. The prophet must speak only the words of God or die, and the people must obey or face accountability.

Deuteronomy 18.15-20 (NRSV)

¹⁵The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet.

¹⁶This is what you requested of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: "If I hear the voice of the LORD my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die." ¹⁷Then the LORD replied to me: "They are right in what they have said. ¹⁸I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. ¹⁹Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable.

²⁰But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die."

Introduction

Some in the church in Corinth have no qualms about eating meat that has been offered in pagan rites (which may very well have been nearly all the meat in Corinth!), because they — personally — do not recognize the existence of the gods to whom the meat was offered or the validity of the rites by which they were offered. Paul reminds these "cognoscenti" that while their reasoning may be correct in theory, most folks in Corinth would have been so saturated by the polytheistic culture that following Jesus for them would have to mean staying away from any association with other ritual practices. Therefore, he warns them not to engage in any action that could be misinterpreted and so "wound the conscience" of "the weak."

1 Corinthians 8.1-13 (NRSV)

¹Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ²Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; ³but anyone who loves God is known by him.

⁴Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "no idol in the world really exists," and that "there is no God but one." ⁵Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—⁶yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

⁷It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸"Food will not bring us close to God." We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? ¹¹So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. ¹²But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

Introduction

This is the final public teaching of Jesus. At the "great assize," the final judgment, the King to Come, seated upon a throne and surrounded by the angels, will judge all based on how they have treated "the least of these."

Matthew 25.31-46 (NRSV)

^{31c}When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' ⁴¹Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴²for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁴Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' ⁴⁵Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' ⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

SCRIPTURE READINGS

for the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 1, 2009

Introduction

Praise to God for fulfilling promises of deliverance, establishing the nation, and providing guidance for the people.

Psalms 111 (NRSV)

- 1 Praise the LORD!
I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.
- 2 **Great are the works of the LORD,
studied by all who delight in them.**
- 3 Full of honor and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures forever.
- 4 **He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds;
the LORD is gracious and merciful.**
- 5 He provides food for those who fear him;
he is ever mindful of his covenant.
- 6 **He has shown his people the power of his works,
in giving them the heritage of the nations.**
- 7 The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy.
- 8 **They are established forever and ever,
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.**
- 9 He sent redemption to his people;
he has commanded his covenant forever.
Holy and awesome is his name.
- 10 **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.
His praise endures forever.**

Introduction

The Lord promises to raise up a future prophet, like Moses, to continue speaking to the covenant people, Israel. The reason