



Your comments are welcome!



Blame God

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Dear Friend of the Missions,

The beginning of October is the time when all the Franciscan family celebrates St. Francis of Assisi. On October 3 we remember his passing and on October 4 we celebrate his feast day.

We pray in a very special way for all our family, friends and benefactors who support us so generously. On October 11 the Church remembers Blessed John XXIII. His feast day is assigned to the day that he opened the Second Vatican Council in

1962. Keep the Church in your prayers. October 15 is the feast of St. Teresa of Avila, the Carmelite mystic and Doctor of the Church. October is also the month of the rosary. When you pray, keep in mind the October intentions of the Church in the United States: we are encouraged to pray for better respect of life and for vocations. Thank you for all your help and support. Please continue to pray for the missions and trust that all of us pray for you. May the Lord bless you and those you love.



I had the occasion this summer to study the Old Testament books called the Deuteronomistic History: Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel and I and II Kings. It is always interesting to read these books, there are some delightful stories that all of us know: Samson and Delilah and David and Goliath are just a few. Scholars think that the Book of Deuteronomy which tells again the establishment of the covenant and the preparation for entering the Promised Land, is a introduction to all the books. It sets the stage.

The other books tell how well the people of Israel kept the covenant and lived as God's holy people. There were not a lot of successes. There is a pattern of interpretation in the books that explains the events that are remembered so that the people of Israel might learn from their mistakes and do better. The pattern is: the people rebel, God punishes them, the people turn back to God and cry for help, and God sends them the help they need to be saved. If you take the time to read you can see the pattern over and over again, both in the lives of the community and the lives of individuals.

There is something about the pattern that is worth reflecting on, even as we try to live faithfully in these days: rebellion, punishment, crying out for help and restoration.

Rebellion. Rebelling often carries with it the idea that there is good reason to rebel. But in the case of the people with God, there is no good reason. God is not oppressive, selfish or self-serving. God is loving and kind and compassionate: often, even in the Old Testament, you hear God spoken of as slow-to-anger and rich-in-loving kindness. Perhaps we all have to acknowledge that our unfaithfulness cannot be described as rebellion. We choose to walk away from God because we are easily tempted to make selfish choices and do self-serving things. Usually these cause disaster.

Punishment. When this disaster of Israel's selfish choices came about, people said that God punished them. This may be a big mistake and offer some VERY confusing images of God. The people cry out and say: "God is punishing us," as we ourselves are often tempted to do. This view is very convenient for us all. Forgetting we are sinners, we can identify ourselves as victims. We look up to heaven with an attitude that forgets what we did, and makes the results of what we did a punishment from God. God does not come off very well in this process. Perhaps Israel (and anyone who is tempted this way) would have been better to acknowledge their own responsibility for the results of their actions, and not blame God!

Think about it. Our actions carry with them their own consequences and often punishments. If we lie and, as a result, we get in trouble and people begin not to trust us, is this a punishment from God or the results of our action? If we think this is God's punishment, then we become victims and forget who really is responsible for the problems. Israel did the same thing.

Their unfaithfulness to the covenant made them weak and divided. Other nations just waited for the right time. The Philistines were always ready to take advantage. This certainly was not the result of God's punishment, but Israel's unfaithfulness. But they concentrated more on God's anger than their fault—to say the least. Then they forgot how they caused much of the problem...easier then to fall again. There is a lesson for us all in there!

Crying Out for Help. When the people of Israel came to its senses, they cried out to God for help. They acknowledged that they had acted badly and asked God to save them. Here is where God is always seen as listening and responding. This is not a bad image of God to hold in our hearts. The Lord hears the cries of the poor, even those who were made poor by their own mistakes. This is a great legacy that Israel left for us. Even as they shied away from responsibility, they certainly trusted that God hears their prayers.

Jesus would make this point even stronger. God hears our cries for help and also, our cries for forgiveness. God responds quickly to these cries. The whole Bible helps us to have this confidence.

Restoration. In the Bible this happened when God raised up someone to save Israel: a judge, a prophet, a ruler. The people were restored. Unfortunately, in these books of the Bible the pattern repeats itself over and over again.

In the Mystery of Baptism all of us become God's people. In the celebration, we establish a covenant with God and make promises to live as God's people. Each Lent, we seek God's help for forgiveness and the restoration of our lives. Every Easter, we renew our promises and get a fresh start. Sometimes for us, too, the pattern repeats.

As we grow in our spiritual life, we should be discovering better images of God. In order to do this, we may have to mature a bit, especially about taking responsibility for the results of our actions. If we avoid taking responsibility and continue to see the results of our actions as punishments from God, we never quite come to know the God that Jesus gave his life for us to know. God is not punishing us, God is the one who gets us out of the trouble we create. We are never victims of God's wrath, we are saved by God's love. Learning again to be grateful for God's love and forgiveness and striving to live a life of gratefulness can really break the old patterns, then we are free to live life, life in abundance.



Reflection Questions

- 1. Do you believe, as St. Paul says in the Epistle to the Romans, that God is for us?**
- 2. Can you recognize bad patterns in your life?**
- 3. Do you trust that God listens to your prayer for help?**

**Please remember our missionaries
who are celebrating their birthdays:**

Oct. 1: Fr. Joseph Ehrhardt, O.F.M. (Kenya)
Oct. 6: Fr. Paul Breslin, O.F.M. (Peru)
Oct. 7: Fr. Mariano Gagnon, O.F.M. (Peru)
Oct. 9: Fr. Alfonso Guzman, O.F.M. (Caribbean)
Fr. Khoa Nguyen, O.F.M. (Vietnam)

*May the Lord bless them all with peace and
energy to continue the mission of the Gospel!*

**Please remember our present and former
missionaries who are ill:**

Fr. Aloysius Siracuse, O.F.M. (Brazil)
Fr. Charles Finnegan, O.F.M. (Brazil)
Bishop Benedict Coscia, O.F.M. (Brazil)
Fr. Ignatius McGeedy, O.F.M. (Brazil)
Fr. Peter Sheridan, O.F.M. (Home Missions)
Fr. Arthur Murray, O.F.M. (Home Missions)
Fr. Clement Healy, O.F.M. (Jamaica)
Fr. Campion Lally, O.F.M. (Japan)
Fr. Stanilaus Widomski, O.F.M. (Japan)
Fr. Finian Riley, O.F.M. (Africa)
Br. Rosario Vieira, O.F.M. (Brazil)
Fr. Robert Nee, O.F.M. (Brazil)

*May God grant them
health, peace and happiness!*