

LENT: JOURNEYING TO THE CROSS

Third Sunday in Lent

March 7, 2010

Isaiah 55:1-9

Psalm 63:1-8

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 13:1-9

Comprehensive Examination

Most Doctor of Philosophy degrees in the humanities have an examination period between classes and the dissertation stage called Comprehensive Examinations. It is as daunting as it sounds! During this stage, students must study the most important subjects in their field. After a lengthy study period, students “sit for the exam.” Most exams last anywhere from three to six hours while students write everything they know about the subject matter – or, at least until their fingers, eyes and back start to hurt too much to continue! The point of these exams is to help students develop a deep knowledge of all the most important issues in their field of study.

As intimidating and overwhelming as this sounds, there is an even more arduous examination that exists outside Ph.D. programs – self-examination. I am not referring to a medical examination – as important as those are! My point of reference is a spiritual self-examination. The difficult Gospel passage for this week begs a self-reflective response. In every instance, Jesus calls for repentance. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:12, implores his readers, “So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall” (*NRSV*). In other words, examine yourselves.

Spiritual self-examination is nothing new to Christianity. In the 1500s, Saint Ignatius of Loyola developed a method of prayer called the Prayer of Examen. The point of the prayer is to reflect on the day that you just lived, and in that process of retracing your steps, see where you stayed on and strayed from the path that God wanted for you. As you remember what you did and did not do throughout your day, you allow the Holy Spirit to point out your strengths and weaknesses, which prepares you for your next day.

This kind of “comprehensive examination” helps each of us develop a deep knowledge of all the most important issues in our own lives – and, with God’s help, gives us the capacity and desire for transformation. As we enter into the depths of Lent, the Prayer of Examen can be a spiritual exercise that brings our heart closer to the heart of God, so that our song will echo that of the psalmist, “For you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy” (Psalm 63:7, *NRSV*).

This week's Reflection was prepared by the Rev. K. Jason Coker, an ordained minister with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and pastor of Wilton Baptist Church in Wilton, Connecticut. Visit www.wiltonbaptist.org to learn more about the ministries of Wilton Baptist Church.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Puerto Rico –

With thanks for God's guidance in work among prisoners, especially young offenders, and with thanks to God that the past year marked 25 years of the Radio Bible Reading Marathon, and with prayers for work among young Catholics with *Lectio Divina*, and with thanks to God for extraordinary moments of spiritual growth among participants;

Dominican Republic – With thanks to God for the progress made in improving relationships with churches and ministries, and with prayers for the ability to acquire three new vehicles to help with distribution and other work, and with prayers for new projects that will be undertaken this year; **French Antilles** – With prayers for Bible work in these islands.

Activity Corner: “Prayer of Examen”

Supplies needed: Bible; newsprint; marker; writing paper; pens or pencils.

Psalms 61-63 comprise a set of prayers that express trust in God and commend the practice of prayer. On a sheet of newsprint, make three columns with the headers: Psalm 61; Psalm 62; Psalm 63. In Psalm 61, how is prayer answered? In Psalm 62, how is prayer encouraged? What does Psalm 63 teach about prayer? Encourage members of your household to discuss these questions and note their responses on newsprint. Invite everyone to compose a prayer at the end of the day, following the Saint Ignatius of Loyola spiritual exercise of the “Prayer of Examen.” This spiritual exercise involves the following steps: 1) recalling you are in the presence of God; 2) recalling your day with gratitude; 3) asking for guidance from the Holy Spirit; 4) reviewing your day; 5) seeking reconciliation, expressing your sorrow and then thanks for God's love and restoration; 6) concluding with the Lord's Prayer. For more detailed information about the Prayer of Examen, visit this website: www.marshall.org/pdf/hc/practices/prayerOfExamen.pdf Encourage everyone to follow this discipline throughout the week.