

Words that feed us

"You are blest who gaze into the depths." One line leapt out from the lectionary and absorbed my attention. Up until that point, the words of the responsorial psalm were bouncing off my psyche like harmless pebbles: "You are blest, Lord God of our fathers." (Okay.) "You are blessed in the temple of your glory." (Yep, sounds pretty much like God.) "You are blest on the throne of your kingdom." (Uh-huh.) But the next line came hurtling through and pierced my liturgical coma: "You are blest who gaze into the depths."

Now I was awake. And wondering. What does it mean to "gaze into the depths"? What are those depths? The ocean deep? The eyes of a loved one? The profundity of truth? And why is one who gazes into them blessed? Indeed, why would Almighty God be praised for simply, well... gazing? Creating the depths, conquering the depths, yes. But "gazing?" Only yesterday I had observed a little child examining, with joyous intensity, a line of ants marching along a cracked pavement. Was she caught up in the Almighty's gaze? Was the psalm also about her? I packed that line into my 'lunch box' as I headed out the door that morning, and 'chewed' on it during the day.

One line of Scripture. I don't think I had ever noticed it before. In fact, although the liturgy has it as a responsorial psalm (during the fifth week of Lent), it is not from the book of Psalms but

rather "Additions to Daniel." God's Word, even a tiny morsel tucked away in a less-read part of the bible, has a mysterious power to nourish and shape our lives. It is spiritual food, every bit as real and as transforming as the Eucharist.

And yet, how easily we can take the Word for granted. As anyone involved in the rough and tumble of parish ministry knows, Scripture can become just another 'component' in a jam-packed religious agenda. We have all kinds of community issues to attend to, teachings to impart, liturgies to organize, pastoral problems to solve, paper-work to complete and logistics to sort through... And somewhere in all that we have to proclaim the Word of God in such a way as to stir hearts and transform lives. Phew!

I have recently concluded a five year experience as a pastoral associate in a busy, urban, multi-cultural parish and, among its many enriching lessons, one thing it taught me is to spend less time trying to create catechetical sessions that bring all the pieces together, and more time enticing parishioners to fall in love with Scripture. Even where catechesis is biblically-based, there is the temptation to use Scripture more as a jump-off point into an explanation of a Church teaching rather than helping people to savor the story itself. We are storytelling beings. We love stories. We feed on story. And when a good story captures our hearts and imaginations it has

immense power over our lives. Essentially, conversion is about listening to the story of God and God's people, and discovering how one's own life has a place within that great unfolding drama recorded in both Testaments.

Scripture-based prayers are a special way for God's Word to be digested in our lives, and I have always liked to share with catechumens prayers such as Aaron's Blessing (Num.6:24-26), the Psalms ('the prayer book of Jesus'), the Magnificat (Lk.1:46-55), the Lord's prayer (Lk.11:2-4), Pauline prayers (e.g., Eph.3:14-21), to name a few. Lectio divina, too, is a powerful way of nourishing ourselves with the sacred text.

And you? What words of Scripture have captivated you; have become 'food' for your life?•

