

DEACON JOHN HALL'S HOMILY

Third Sunday in Lent, March 20, 2022

True or false: The Stations of the Cross at St. Andrew's Cathedral downtown were ordered extra large so that people could see them better. False. They were intended for the cathedral in Chicago and somehow they ended up in LR.

True or false: In the 179 year history of the Diocese of Little Rock, every bishop found Arkansas to be a welcoming home and loved it here. False. Our first Bishop Andrew Byrne, in 1843 first visited here and the wrote to Pope Gregory and said thanks but no thanks.

True of False: Catholics have a reputation of not knowing their bible. True! Let's disprove that – right now.

Our First Reading was taken from the Book of Exodus. It is considered one of the foundational books of the bible as it was the first time that God intervened in human history. We can connect a few of the specifics of the Book of Exodus to historical people, places and events.

The reading focuses on Moses his life and how he answered God's call. Moses was born in? Egypt. His parents were? Hebrews. When Moses was born there was an order from Pharaoh to kill all the male newborns. Moses life was spared because his birth mother hid him for three months. When she could no longer hide him she put him in a basket in the reeds on the banks of the Nile. Who found the basket? Pharaoh's daughter found the basket and told Pharaoh's daughter ordered her servant to find a Hebrew woman to nurse this child. Who was selected? Moses own mother. Moses grew up in the House of the Pharaoh. When Moses was an adult, one day he saw? An Egyptian striking a Hebrew. In the process of defending the Hebrew victim, he killed the Egyptian. Pharaoh heard of the incident and wanted Moses killed. So Moses fled to Midian. While in Midian, he met Zipporah and helped her water her flock. After Zipporah returned home, she told her father, Reuel/Jethro, what happened. So Zipporah's father invited Moses to eat with them. Moses and Zipporah married. They had a son named Gershom. A long time passed during which the king of Egypt died. God saw the Israelites, and God knew it was time to act. And that's where our First Reading begins. The Burning Bush.

Life was good for Moses. He had been truly blessed. His life was spared at birth. He grew up in a well-to-do lifestyle - - the total opposite of his enslaved Hebrew kinfolk. Moses was well educated and wealthy, because he grew up in the royal house of Pharaoh. He was spared the life of slavery, and he was now living a comfortable life in Midian with his wife and her family.

But had Moses given anything back? No. And it was not because he owed God — but because he was grateful for what he had been given. God's appearance in the burning bush got the attention of Moses - - and he didn't ignore God or run away. He listened to God, and after some reluctance, he accepted God's call to be a leader of the Hebrew people.

Every one of us has experienced a burning Bush in our lives because if we hadn't . . . we wouldn't be here this morning. But like the olive tree in the gospel parable: Have we given back? The gardener in the parable reminds us that we stand on fertile ground and it's time to produce some fruit – give back. On Ash Wednesday we heard the words: Repent **and** believe in the Gospel. Remember the rich man who asked Jesus: What must I do to inherit eternal life? Keeping the Ten Commandments isn't enough. Go and sell what you have, give it to the poor and come follow me. Not because we owe God anything, not because I'm trying to earn my way into heaven. We simply give back out of gratitude for the blessings received and because we love and care for one another. We pray that our Lord helps us to be like Moses. To recognize God's voice, to see God's presence, to answer God's call, and to stand with God on holy ground.

*This is holy Ground
we are standing on holy ground.
For the Lord is here
And where he is, is holy*