

The Fifth Sunday of Lent

March 25, 2007

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalm 126

Philippians 3:4b-14

John 12:1-8

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I read somewhere that in a recent survey the majority of Americans said that they believe in God; at least in some sort of “supreme being.”

They didn’t say that they believed in organized religion. They didn’t say that they attended a church, just that they believed.

The second question was “How does that belief in God affect your everyday life?” The answers became quite fuzzy. Some said that, at best, God was someone who set a few rules but was either too remote or too neutral, perhaps too nice and sympathetic with us, to really enforce them.

The picture that formed was that of a sort of vague something that was a cushion, a benign, sympathetic “help-line” sort of God. A nice God: a God with whom we could be comfortable.

Actually, that’s not so bad. It’s all right to be comfortable with God; in fact, God might like that. He could be a sort of best friend. The trouble comes when we become so very comfortable that we think of God only as a friend, not The Creator, Sanctifier, and Redeemer of the

world. Then we reduce God to just another person remarkably like ourselves and make God available for bargaining, making deals.

God becomes our equal. If God is our equal, we have just as much right and entitlement to this Vineyard as God does.

Here we sit in our very own private Vineyard, convinced that this creation of God's is ours to play with and to dispose of. We really lose sight of the fact that we are just tenants occupying a very small piece of creation for a very short time, and we really don't like to be reminded of that. We get a little short with reminders that we are just passing through. We can still stone a few prophets if they really annoy us.

And we ask, "If God really did take exception to how we behave, would we still be here?" That, of course, is sort of a quotation from a bystander watching Noah pound the last few nails into the hull of the Ark; probably followed by, "Did you feel a raindrop?"

You see the problem. If we reduce God to our level, and we have a pretty good idea of our capabilities, we demote Him from being the omnipotent, omniscient Creator of worlds to being just another participant in things. That's a long way to fall. We take away God's power to change things, and all things remain static, the same forever.

Is that true? Is that your experience that things don't change? Are we just what we have always been? Frankly, my aching back and sore feet tell me that time has its effects.

On a grand and cosmic scale Isaiah tells us that God is creating, constantly creating, a "new thing," a new world, a new you and a new me. He tells us that even now God is cutting a path through the "dry wilderness" of what has always been to lead us straight to what is to be, the Vineyard that is the Kingdom of God here in our world. Then Noah's flood becomes living water for all who thirst.

In His Holy Name.