

Lent 4

In the 1940s in Boston there was a man named Michael J. Curley. He was a politician, and a very popular one, at least among Democrats and Irish Catholics, for he was one of them. He was elected as the mayor of Boston quite a few times, even once when he was in prison for having taken an exam for a government job for a friend. He also served as governor for at least one term. At election times when he was running there was a little ditty which people used to quote which said: “Vote often and early for James Michael Curley.”

This ditty came to mind because in our first reading for today we read: “Early and often did the Lord, the God of their fathers, send his messengers to them. The “them” here refers to the people of Israel. We are reading from one of the historical books of the Old Testament, the second book of Chronicles, which records the history of the nation of Israel. Much of this history is a record of the “divine often and early,” that is, the many interventions which God made in history to save and protect his chosen people. The rest of this history is that of Israel’s answer to these interventions—or should we rather say its lack of an answer. For the people often rejected God and his prophets, and as result they

suffered defeat and disaster. In the section from which we read today we have the story of the great destruction of the people in the 500s B.C. when the Babylonians captured Jerusalem and deported many of the Jews to Babylonia, present day Iraq. But then the Babylonian kingdom fell to the Persians, and at the end of this section we are told that God intervenes once again, this time using the Persian king Cyrus to restore the people to their own land.

This same understanding of history as being a dialogue between God and human beings continues in the New Testament. Here again it is God who initiates the conversation, and here again the human response is often one of indifference or downright neglect. The great intervention here is Jesus Christ, recognized as God coming in person though in human form. But the response of many is negative. John puts it this way in today's Gospel: "And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil."

We ought to see our life as a conversation with God. But to do that, we have to open our eyes and examine our lives. We can live without doing that, but then we are not living a life of faith. To live a life of faith is to seek to recognize God's voice speaking to us in and through the events of our lives. Non-believers don't do that.

For them all of life is a matter of coincidences, some good, some bad. For the believer, on the other hand, every event leaves a divine foot print. Reviewing his or her life, the believer says: “Here God was working for me to make things turn out for my good.” It is good to review the day each night in order to see where and how God has provided for me this day. That famous sentence from today’s Gospel, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...,” if it is to have any meaning must mean not only that there was this one great, stupendous divine intervention in history in Jesus, but that God is constantly intervening on our behalf, and not in the sense that God interrupts the natural flow of events but rather that He makes use of this flow, turns it in this and that direction, to help us, to protect us, to guide us to Himself.

That is our way of life as believers, as those who recognize that history is a conversation with God. But what are we to do about all those who do not believe this? It seems that many of our contemporaries do not believe it. There isn’t much that we can do about that except live our own lives in faith and hope that our witness will make it possible for them to believe that they can do the same, that they too can and should believe that there is a God who loves them and guides their lives and asks them to recognize his loving guidance. If we do that as individuals, and if we do that

as a community, then the rest is up to God, and we can rest assured that we have done what we can to help our brothers and sisters to recognize God's call to them in the concreteness of their daily lives.