

November 9, 2014 ~ Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome

The Color of Hope

Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12; 1 Corinthians 3:9c-11, 16-17; John 2:13-22

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*Do you not know that you are the temple of God,
and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? [1 Corinthians 3:16]*

The picture of life can sometimes be discouraging. And yet, the frame we choose for that picture makes a difference in what we see in the picture.

Switch out a picture from a black frame, put it inside a blue or a red frame, and you'll see colors and hues in the picture you hadn't been aware of. Similarly, how you choose to frame life makes a difference in how you see life. Consider the following story.

A king wants to know how many flowers are in his kingdom. So, he sends out an assistant to take a census of all the flowers. Then, he sends out another assistant to take a census of all the weeds in his kingdom.

Soon, the first assistant returns glowing with wonder and grinning from ear to ear. "My Lord, I'm delighted to live in your kingdom. I've never seen so many flowers before. Please, I hope my family and I can stay forever in your kingdom."

Suddenly, the second assistant barges into the king's chambers, declaring, "My Lord, I've never been so discouraged in my life. Your kingdom is so utterly unattractive with all the weeds. I've never seen so many flowers before. Please allow my family and me to leave your kingdom at once."

One assistant sees the kingdom framed with flowers and is hopeful. The other frames the kingdom with weeds and is discouraged. Change the frame, and life appears to be different.

Teenagers: every adult here knows that life can be discouraging. Everyone knows that, because everyone has experienced it. It's why we hope that you choose to frame your life with the hope and faith that brings us into this sacred space on Sundays. It's why I always have time for you. And today's Scripture readings speak to the importance of framing our lives with hope.

In today's first reading, a prophet wants to instill a sense of hope in the Hebrew people. He wants to reframe their difficult experiences so they look forward with hope.

The time is nearly 600 years before Christ. The Hebrew people had been removed from the Holy Land and taken into exile in Babylon. Their revered Jerusalem temple was destroyed. The prophet Ezekiel wants people to know that, despite the tears they shed while in exile, they can still be a people of hope, that they needn't be overwhelmed with fear and feelings of abandonment.

He reframes the picture for them with an image of the waters of life that will one day flow from the Jerusalem temple and that a new covenant of life will again be their experience. He reframes their exile with an understanding that God has not abandoned them, the temple will be rebuilt, and they will be restored to a life centered on the Jerusalem temple. He reframes their exile and captivity with the color of hope.

Without the frame of hope, life risks being like a road to nowhere. This past Friday marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and I thought back to a road to nowhere, or rather, a roadmap to nowhere.

While in high school, I spend a summer in West Germany. For two months, I live with a family in a small town just a few miles from the border with communist East Germany. I visit the border (the *Zonengrenze*) several times and see how the East Germans secure the border so their people can't cross easily into West Germany. There are booby-traps, mine fields, and guard towers with soldiers who have shoot-to-kill orders.

Then, in 2003, I visit my German friends for a month. I tell Wolfgang that I'd like to go to where the border had been and see the difference now that the two Germanys are reunited. So, we spend much of one day driving back and forth across the former border and stopping at places I visited long ago.

In a small town, we visit a museum dedicated to the border between East and West Germany. I see a roadmap, published in the former East Germany that shows absolutely nothing on the West German side of the border. The communist authorities didn't want the map to give people any hope of leaving. It was a roadmap to nowhere.

Now, back to today's readings. Forty years after Jesus' death and resurrection, the Roman army is fed up with Jewish rebelliousness. They toss most of the Jews out of the Holy Land, and they destroy the Jerusalem temple, again. Jews have to figure out how to maintain their Jewish identity without access to the temple.

And yet, the early Christians know that their faith in Jesus Christ allows them to frame their lives with hope, a hope borne with a different sense of temple life. In today's second reading, Saint Paul expresses this with a question put to early Christians and to each one of us today:

*Do you not know that you are the temple of God,
and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

And today's proclamation of the Gospel expresses the conviction of early Christians that we maintain to this day. True worship of God puts our focus on Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus is our temple where the covenant of life is found and worship takes place.

Jesus is our roadmap. Jesus frames our lives with the color of hope. Jesus is why we can see life differently.

And thus we can say: *We choose to follow Jesus Christ.*