Conformed to Christ Crucified

Volume Two

More Meditations on Priestly Life and Ministry
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I

THE WATERS AT MERIBA
Choosing life in Christ

Reading: Baruch 1:15-22

At Meriba on the day of Massah, God commanded Moses to bring forth water from the rock to quench the Israelites’ thirst. Satisfied only momentarily, they soon forsook God’s ways. Their hearts went astray. Therefore, in His anger, God swore: “They [shall] not enter into my rest” (Psalm 95:11). If there are words no more beautiful to the human ear than those words which the Crucified Christ spoke to the Good Thief, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43), then there are words no more terrifying than those of this divine decree, “They shall not enter into my rest.” With what great anguish we should read in Sacred Scripture and proclaim daily at our pre-dawn vigil how the Hebrews “tested [God] and put [God] to the proof, though they had seen [His] work” (Psalm 95:9). Having set before them life and death, Moses exhorted the people to choose life. But despite the mighty deeds which they had clearly
seen, they repeatedly chose death. Woefully conscious of their rebellious heritage, the Israelites’ descendants in Babylonian exile lamented that “from the day when the Lord brought [their] fathers out of the land of Egypt until today, [they had] been disobedient to the Lord [their] God, and [they had] been negligent, in not heeding his voice” (Baruch 1:19).

Centuries later, echoing the refrain of Meriba and Massah, Christ rebuked Chorazin and Bethsaida for failing to repent after having witnessed the mighty deeds which He Himself had performed in their midst. The citizens of Chorazin and Bethsaida had eyes and ears, but they failed to see and hear. “And you, Capernaum,” Jesus continued, “will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades” (Luke 10:15). For, lamentably, its inhabitants had also chosen death.

Every generation must confront for itself the perennial choice between life and death. Our generation is no exception. Like the Hebrew people at Meriba on the day of Massah, we ourselves stand before streams of life giving water flowing forth from the Rock who is Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:4). Our Savior compassionately invites us to draw water from His open Heart: “If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink” (John 7:37). From Him flow the living waters which unfailingly quench man’s thirst. Will we “draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation” (Preface for the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, The Roman Missal, 3rd edition, 2011), or will we close our parched mouths to Christ? During these days of retreat, Christ pours forth His grace upon us. Are our hearts open to receive His gift?
CONFORMED TO CHRIST CRUCIFIED

In his Meditation on the Two Standards found in the Second Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, Saint Ignatius presents us with the Mosaic choice in christological form (cf. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, *Spiritual Exercises* § 136-148). Are we to be seduced by a love of money which leads to false honor and deadly pride and thus fall into line behind the banner of Satan as we march our way into hell? Or do we choose Christ? Do we choose to be poor with Christ poor, insulted with Christ loaded with insults, and thought the fool with Christ deemed hopelessly foolish? Do we choose to embrace the humility of the One “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8)? Will we join the ranks of the Apostles, martyrs and saints who served under Christ’s banner? Or will we pledge allegiance to Satan’s standard? What will we choose? Life or death? Satan or Christ?

Each of us present in this chapel is similar in his own way to the Israelites at Meriba and the first-century Jews at Chorazin and Bethsaida inasmuch as we, too, have seen the mighty deeds of the Lord in our own lives. Had we not beheld God’s providence or heard His voice at some graced moment, we simply would not be here today. My brothers, today is the day of Massah. We stand at the place of Meriba. From Christ’s wounded side pierced by the soldier’s lance flow streams of living water. At the altar we will witness with eyes of faith the mightiest of deeds before which winged seraphim veil the face: created elements gathered from field
and vine become God's flesh and blood. Will you choose life, or will you choose death? Are you to be exalted to heaven or go down to the netherworld? Will you forsake God's rest or enter this day with Him into Paradise?

There is particular urgency in your present choice. For, a year from now—Deo volente—the Church will call you to Holy Orders. You will be ordained deacons and eventually priests to preach God's Word. You will be the heralds of Christ's Gospel. Therefore, my brothers, I exhort you to delay no longer. Set aside everything in your lives that is not of Christ. Choose Christ, serve under His banner, and live!

Rocca di Papa, 3 October 2003
Memorial of Saint Francis Borgia