

## ***Hace Frío en el Horno*** [It's Cool in the Furnace]

¿En qué creemos? ¿Nuestro coraje es suficiente para nuestra convicción? ¿Qué tan fuerte es nuestra fe? ¿Está frío en el horno?

What do we believe? Is our courage sufficient for our conviction? How strong is our faith? Is it cool in the furnace?

*Que las palabras de mi boca y la meditación de nuestro corazón sean aceptables ante tus ojos, oh Señor, mi roca y mi salvación. Amén.* [Salmos 19:14]

Today's lessons provide us with a perfect beginning to our Lenten Journey – a backdrop to our own forty day walk into the wilderness – where we can further explore what we believe, test the sufficiency of our conviction and the strength of our faith.

In the Gospel passage appointed for this Sunday, we are reminded that even Jesus' faith was tested. Mark's Gospel records that immediately after Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan, the Spirit drove him into the wilderness for forty days, where he was tempted by Satan, was with the wild beasts, and was attended to by angels.

St. Mark's Gospel is a kind of a summary overview of this event and does not include the details concerning the nature of Satan's attempt to tempt Jesus as described in St. Matthew's more detailed account. In St. Mathew's account, at the end of Jesus' 40 days and nights of fasting and prayer, when he was famished, the tempter came to Him and said, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." Of course we know that with or without Satan, Jesus could have made bread from stones or anything else, but he would not be tempted by the devil. He said NO, and reminded the Satan that "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." It's all about faith, about what we believe.

After this ploy didn't work, Satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple in the holy city and tempted Him to demonstrate His power over death. Again Jesus refused, telling the devil that one does not put God to the test. By His example, Jesus teaches us about belief, courage of conviction, and faith.

Trying one more time, Satan took Jesus to a high mountain, showed Him all of the kingdoms of the world and offered all of them to Him if He would just bow down and worship Satan. Jesus reminded the tempter that it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only Him." Then, the devil left and angels came to minister to Jesus. Of

course, from last week's Gospel reading, we know how God felt about Jesus: "This is my son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him!"

Today's Gospel reminds me of one of my favorite Bible stories. A story many of us learned as children. A story, like this Gospel, that in many respects goes to the heart of what we believe; a story about courage and faith, and the rewards of following the one true King. A story about the strength to say "NO," when it would be much easier to just say "YES," and just go along with the program. A story about what it means to be a Christian.

Do you remember the story from the Book of Daniel, Chapter 3, about the three Jews whom king Nebuchadnezzar had appointed over his affairs in the province of Babylon? About Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who demonstrated their profound faith in the word of God and the courage of their conviction – even when threatened with the fiery furnace?

As you will recall, King Nebuchadnezzar had commanded that anytime you heard the music of the horn, the pipe, the lyre... In fact, anytime you heard any kind of music at all, you were supposed to bow down and worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden idol.

When it was reported to him that these three men had refused to follow his command, King Nebuchadnezzar had Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego brought before him. And, when they looked him in the face, stood toe-to-toe with him, and refused to bow down and worship his gods and his golden idol, Nebuchadnezzar was mad. He was really angry. These were his men, his appointees, trusted servants who had challenged his authority as the king. People he had put in charge of his affairs in Babylon. Even after he had given them one more chance to bow to his authority, they wouldn't even oblige him in this one little thing.

So Nebuchadnezzar had the fiery furnace stoked-up seven times hotter than it would have normally been and ordered them thrown in. Of course, as you know, this story has a happy ending. Because of their courage, their profound belief, and their faith in the one true God, they were shielded from the fiery flames. What's more, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's faith was so strong and the power of God's deliverance was so profound, that Nebuchadnezzar blessed their God and decreed that no one should serve or worship any god except the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – The one, true God.

Borrowing from the title of a children's play about this Bible story, "It's cool in the furnace." It's cool in the furnace. IT IS COOL IN THE FURNACE! Now it is not likely that our faith will be tested in such a profound way and no one is threatening to toss us in a fiery furnace to test our beliefs. But every day we are faced with golden idols of one sort or another. Every day, we are presented with challenges, large and small, significant and seemingly insignificant, that test our courage, challenge the sufficiency of our conviction, make us examine our faith, and consider our resolve as Christians.

But, we don't have to look back to the temptation of Jesus or to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed'nego to find examples of courage, conviction and faith. There are more recent examples: It was cool in the furnace, when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on that Montgomery, Alabama bus that day. It was cool in the furnace, when the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. organized boycotts in Selma, Alabama. It was cool in the furnace, when Dr. King and his followers peacefully faced attack dogs, tear gas, water hoses, and the jeers of the opponents of desegregation and civil rights. It was cool in the furnace, when Martin Luther King declared that one day all people will be will be judged by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin. It was cool in the furnace, when a young Columbine high school student confessed her belief in God and was shot dead where she stood. It was cool in the furnace, when firefighters, police officers, and ordinary citizens stood in harm's way and selflessly gave their lives to rescue victims at the site of the World Trade Center disaster. And, it was cool in the furnace, when the passengers aboard United Airlines flight 93 gave their lives to protect their fellow citizens on the ground.

Courage, conviction, and faith need not, and for most of us would not, put our life in peril. Each day offers us a new opportunity to strive to seek and serve the Lord. Today, it can be cool in the furnace, when a teenager says no to today's golden idol of drugs and underage alcohol consumption. It can be cool in the furnace, when we tell a coworker that we don't want to hear off-color jokes. And, it can be cool in the furnace, when we stand tall, in the face of criticism and derision, for what we know to be good, right and just.

Of course, we are not perfect and we'll make mistakes. Our reading from Genesis reminds us, we will be tested and may not always make the grade, but as in the story of Noah, there is the rainbow representing God's covenant with us and every living creature on the Earth. Further, as our Baptismal Covenant reminds us, we will inevitably fall into sin. God knows this. However, our lesson from the Psalm offers us the reassurance of redemption. In Psalm 25:5-9, as the psalmist wrote:

5 Remember, O LORD, your compassion and love,  
for they are from everlasting.

6 Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions; remember  
me according to your love and for the sake of your goodness, O  
LORD.

7 Gracious and upright is the LORD;  
therefore he teaches sinners in his way.

8 He guides the humble in doing right  
and teaches his way to the lowly.

9 All the paths of the LORD are love and faithfulness  
to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

And, as our lesson from 1 Peter reminds us, Christ suffered for our sins in order to bring us to God.

So, following the example of those like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed'nego; Rosa Parks; the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King; the young student at Columbine High School; the firefighters, police officers, and ordinary citizens at ground zero; the passengers aboard United flight 93; folks like ourselves who struggle daily with the trials, tribulations, and the daily challenges of life; and most especially, following the example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, let us continue our journey into the wilderness during this forty-day Lenten season – exploring our courage, the strength of our conviction, and our faith...

Ha●ce frí●o en el hor●no!

It's cool in the furnace!

En el nombre del Padre, del Hijo, y del Espíritu Santo, Amén.