

Homily for Thursday in the Fourth Week of Lent

March 26, 2020

The Holy Eucharist

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Exodus 32:7–14; Psalm 106:19–23\*; John 5:30–47*

The lesson and the psalm go together. Moses has gone up on Mount Sinai. He has been there with the Lord for forty days and forty nights. Exodus tells us, “When God finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.”<sup>1</sup>

But all is not right: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Go down at once! Your people . . . have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it.’ ”<sup>2</sup> Earlier in Exodus, God told Moses, “Whoever sacrifices to any god, save to the LORD only, shall be utterly destroyed.”<sup>3</sup> God seems ready to do just that. As we read in the psalm, “So [the LORD] would have destroyed them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath from consuming them.”<sup>4</sup> But this is not the first time God changed his mind. That happened in

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 31:18, NRSV.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 32:7–8a, NRSV.

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 22:19.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 106:23.

the story that we call the Creation and the Fall of Man, the story of the human and the woman, who will come to be named Adam and Eve. “And the Lord God commanded the [human], ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.’”<sup>5</sup> But Adam and Eve did not die that day. What’s so interesting about the story of the golden calf is that it is Moses who helps God change God’s mind.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, writing in his blog *Covenant and Conversation* on this passage, writes, “God wants His forgiveness to override His justice, because strict justice hurts humanity, and humanity is God’s creation and carries his image.”<sup>6</sup>

When questioned about how he lived in light of the law, eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus replied, “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”<sup>7</sup> During Lent we pray over the bread and wine, “You bid your faithful people cleanse

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 2:16–17.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Sacks, “Moses Annuls a Vow (Ki Tissa 5780),” *Covenant and Conversation* (blog), March 9, 2020, <http://rabbisacks.org/ki-tissa-5780/>.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 9:13.

the hearts and prepare with joy for the Paschal feast.”<sup>8</sup>  
In all likelihood, it will be a very different Holy Week  
and Easter Day this year for Christians almost  
everywhere. That said, Easter will come.

May the Divine Assistance remain with us always and  
with those who are absent from us.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 379.