

## Homily for Wednesday in the Fifth Week of Lent, April 1, 2020

### The Holy Eucharist

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Daniel 3:14–20, 24–28; Psalm 17:1–5\*; John 8:31–42*

I want to begin by mentioning the name of a priest who died on the Feast of Saint Simon and Saint Jude, Wednesday, October 31, 1981. I was in my second year of seminary at Nashotah House. Since it was a Major Feast day, the community's weekly Solemn Mass was celebrated on Wednesday night that week. (The weekly community Solemn Mass was usually on Thursday nights. But we arranged our lives around the Church Calendar, as Saint Mary's still does.)

A baby of a student and his wife was baptized that evening. They had lost their first and only other child to a horrible accident. Some of you may remember a time when Ford Pintos turned out to be a bad car. Their child died when the car slipped into reverse and went into a lake. It was a hard but joyous celebration. I think Father Weil may have been preacher for the service. After the Mass there was a joyous community dinner. Tragically, in the course the dinner we learned that Father John Moser, a recent and infamous high church graduate of the House, had been killed that afternoon when an elderly driver managed to enter an interstate highway driving in the wrong direction. He

had just been elected rector of Blessed Sacrament Church in Green Bay.

Sometime later, a great part of his library was offered to us students. I grabbed liturgical stuff, including a copy of the second edition of *Lesser Feast and Fasts* from 1973. It was the first edition to include collects and readings for the weekdays of Lent. Its note about this lectionary for these weekdays said, “The new schedule of Lessons, but not of the Psalms, is substantially that proposed for experimental use in the Roman Catholic Church’s *Ordo Lectionum Missae* of 1969.”<sup>1</sup>

I raise this history today because since then we have continued to follow the Roman Catholic Church in omitting the most problematic words in John about the Jewish people. Tomorrow the first lesson is short enough so that can add it. We will hear Jesus say to the Jews, among other things, “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires.”<sup>2</sup>

The Episcopal Church does this kind of thing too in its own lectionaries. More than one uncomfortable, sometimes terrifying, passage is left out of the Daily

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<sup>1</sup><sup>2</sup> John 8:44a.

Office Lectionary, not to mention the Lectionary for Sunday Eucharists and Major Feasts.

In her book *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John*, Professor of New Testament and Second Temple Judaism Adele Reinhartz's last words on this verse are, "My heart still sinks every time I open the Gospel of John to 8:44 and read that the Jews have the devil as their father."<sup>3</sup> I think more our hearts, our hearts, need to sink as hers does. That said, there's a lot of good stuff here too—and Father Smith will have the very worst and the very best to work with tomorrow.

I am an Episcopalian for many reasons, among them, to the extent that we fallible humans can be, I want my religion to be honest about its past, its present, and its hope for the future. My own favorite verse from today is this, "Jesus said, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'"

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

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<sup>3</sup> Adele Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John* (New York: Continuum 2001), 167.