

Scripture Reflection on the Mass Readings for Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent (Passiontide)

First Reading Genesis 17:3-9

Psalm 104(105):4-9 *The Lord remembers his covenant for ever*

Gospel John 8:51-59

In the scriptures when God gives someone a new name it usually means they have a new vocation or a new status. We recall how Simon was given the name of Peter, which literally means rock, when Jesus said to him, 'You are the rock on which I will build my Church.' In today's first reading it's Abram's turn to have a new name. God makes a new covenant with Abraham. Actually God make three promises to Abraham which would form the basis of His relationship with His people Israel and ultimately with us as the new People of God the Church.

The first promise He makes to Abraham is that he will be the Father of a multitude of nations, despite his wife Sarah being 90 years of age. Then God promises that Abraham and his descendants will be given a land for ever, in perpetuity, the whole land of Canaan, the land we now know, since 1948 as Israel. Finally God tells Abraham, I will be your God, a promise which is carried forward to all who believe and trust in God, that He is with us always.

In the Gospel reading from St John Jesus speaks the unspeakable to the Jews. He declares that even before Abraham ever was, I AM. By calling Himself I AM he is telling the Jews that He is the Son of God, He is revealing His Divine identity. By making this claim Jesus was in effect signing His own death warrant. To the Jews, the very thought that God would become a man was scandalous and blasphemous. From that moment on they would be plotting to take Jesus' life. They picked stones to throw at Him there and then but, because His time had not yet come, He hid Himself and left the Temple.

In these uncertain times, when we cannot live a normal life and do all the things we like to do, when we are even prevented from carrying

out our religious duties in a public way by attending church, it is a great comfort to know that God is still with us, that no matter what else changes in life He will never change, He is with us and His Church until the end of time.

Perhaps the greatest deprivation at the present time is not being able to receive Our Lord in Holy Communion, even though we may receive Him spiritually. You don't realise how much something means until it is taken away. This is why when the faith is under threat, as it is in many countries today, the faith often grows stronger in the hearts of God's faithful people. God is testing us at the moment, He wants to see how much we appreciate His presence in our lives, how much we love Him, how far we are prepared to go to do His will and keep His commandments. He is waiting for our response, what will yours be?

Deacon Kevin