

The readings for Sunday, March 17, 2019:

First Reading: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Psalm: Psalm 27

Second Reading: Philippians 3:17--4:1

Gospel: Luke 13:31-35

This Gospel is one of those that might tempt us moderns to feel superior. We're not like that wicked Jerusalem, are we? We don't stone the prophets and others who are sent to us. We're a civilized people.

But think of how many ways there are to kill the messengers of God. Let's start with our individual Bibles. Do you know where yours is? Have you touched it this week? This month? This year? Of course, we might argue that the Bible app on our phone makes it less important that we have a paper Bible on the shelf. But do we use it? We can look up any chunk of the Bible online and read it in multiple versions. But do we?

One of the main ways God has to speak to us is by way of the Scripture. And if we don't read our Bibles, we lose out on a major avenue of communication with God. You might protest that you hear the Bible plenty when you go to church on Sunday. And that's great. Far too many churches have very little scripture as part of the weekly service. But it's not enough. We'd be better off if we read our Bibles every day. It's far too easy to be seduced by the glittering secular world; a daily diet of Bible reading can help us remember God's claim on us and our purpose in the world.

But the Bible isn't the only way we can learn about God and our place in the community. We can read the works of other holy people. There are plenty of books out there that can help us be more faithful. My reading list is fairly eclectic; if you're new to this, I'd start with the works of Henri Nouwen, Kathleen Norris, Madeleine L'Engle, and Thomas Merton, among many others.

You could also listen for God. Many of us are pretty good at talking to God, especially if we're in trouble. But we're not very good at listening. Henri Nouwen suggests that we take 10 minutes a day to quiet our minds, to sit and just listen. You might also keep a journal, which can be a very valid form of active meditation for busy Westerners. Don't just write down what happens to you during the day. Keep a list of things for which you're grateful. Keep a list of your heartfelt desires. Make a space for any sorts of intuition you have. Ask God for insight. Keep a keen ear for what God replies. Write it down so you won't forget.

There are many ways to stone the prophets that God sends us. One is by ignoring them. Another is by ridiculing. There are many effective ministers and churches out there. Just because one church's style doesn't work for you doesn't mean that you should work to tear it down. There are many ways of being faithful. We should all be about the same business: being a light for Christ in the world, so that we can help people find their way. If someone else's techniques work, we should celebrate that.

We stone the prophets that God sends to us by refusing to pay attention. Look at your life. To whom do you pay highest allegiance? Your God? Your boss? Your nation? Your family? What keeps your loyalties split? How can you find your way back to God?

God tries to get our attention in all sorts of ways. We're prompt to dismiss our strange dreams, both the night kind and the daydreaming kind. We try to ignore the strange yearnings inside us that might be God trying to show us a vision of a different life. We're quick to believe everything our

culture tells us about who we should be, and much too quick to dismiss God's set of alternate values.

In this time of Lent, we can repent for all the times we've metaphorically stoned the prophets We can turn our attention to God and once again, try to be more faithful. God longs to gather us, as a mother hen gathers her chicks. Come be part of the brood.