

***The Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time***  
***July 4, 2021***  
***Year of the Eucharist and Parish (Reflection #25)***

*“Lex orandi; Lex credendi.” (loosely translated: “As the Church prays, she also believes.”)*

Last weekend we focused upon the covenant God made with the children of Israel at the base of Mount Sinai. Directly after this event, Moses again ascends the mountain for 40 days and nights to speak with God. Exodus chapter 32 describes how the children of Israel, restless with Moses’ delay, now demand his brother Aaron construct for them a god similar to the gods whom they were familiar with while still in Egypt. Thus begins the story of the “Golden Bull” statue. It is a story which expresses Moses’ frustration, Aaron’s deception, and the people’s lack of a historical/religious identity. It is also our story as well. Allow me to try and explain what I mean.

I once read an article upon which the author spoke of societal change. He had been told, by someone of influence, that when a society experiences a change, this change can be rather disruptive for some. It may be so disruptive, that it would cause those affected to want to go back and live in an “imagined past.” “Life goes forward,” the author recounted, “it does not go in reverse.” At first glance, it may seem that the children had also succumbed to this logic. Restless from Moses’ delay, they longed for a return to something familiar. They longed for a return to the spirituality of Egypt. Yes, their forced labor was hard and grueling, but their bellies were full and the gods of Egypt were present in the daily society in which they lived. One could easily propose had they kept progressing forward and stopped trying to live in the past, then Israel would not have angered God and frustrated Moses with this sin of the golden bull, this sin of idolatry.

I think we can all agree that life is not lived in the past. Yes, time proceeds onward whether we understand its direction or agree with its outcome. We can learn from the past and these lessons can help us in the future. Yes, yes, and again yes, we can agree with all of these statements. And, all of these can apply to Israel and its decision to construct an idol at the foot of Sinai. However, was it the disruptive change from slavery in Egypt into freedom in the wilderness, which led to a yearning for the “imagined” past which drove Israel into idolatry? Rather, might the starting point Israel’s apostasy have been their present situation?

I may only be speaking for myself, and I truly pray this is not the case, but I have come to realize that I am most tempted to think about “what might have been” when I become restless with life as “it is what it is.” Do not we all, at some point, get worn down by life and its demands, its responsibilities? Have we not all imagined how our lives could have been different? Had we made a different choice at some crucial point in our past, then look at what we might have done, who we could have become, where we may have gone. Could my restless heart as well be due the monotony of life today, right now? When we get bored, do we not find ourselves day dreaming about another life? A life which would be more exciting and interesting compared to how we are living. Could these have been the feelings which ultimately led Israel down the wrong path?

I realize it is quite a temptation to escape from reality into a fantasy world. We have books, movies, television, video games and so many others which are always there to assist our escape. However, this temptation is just that — a temptation. God loves us and interacts with us in the often dull, boring present. God did not love Israel because Israel did not fail Him at Sinai. God loved Israel in spite of the fact Israel did fail Him. The same holds so very true for us. Today, and every day, thank and praise God for who you are and the past which has made you into the person you have become. You, right now, at this moment, are the person God loves and blesses.