

Palm Tuesday

Father Fred Saato

"The Lord said to Jacob, 'Return to the land of your fathers where you were born, and I will be with you.' "

Genesis 31:3

So often it seems that the saints or figures of the Bible are unreal. We find it difficult to identify with people who seem to be flawless. However, Jacob was no plaster saint. He cheated his brother Esau out of his birthright, and by wheeling and dealing with his father-in-law Laban, he managed to all but swindle him out of the best part of his herd. Yet he seemed to sense the protection of God: "I will be with you," God says, and Jacob trusts Him. God says the same thing to us: "I will be with you; I AM with you; trust in Me."

One of the central teachings of our faith is that *God is with us*. How God is with us and whether we can readily discern His presence is another matter, a matter for faith. There are several different experiences for which we use the term faith. One kind of faith can be called doctrinal faith. This is the faith that accepts what God has revealed about Himself. We affirm that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is doctrinal faith.

Another kind of faith is acted-on faith: the putting of what we affirm into practice in our lives. Thus if we believe that Jesus is Lord, we allow Him to have control over all areas of our life.

But the faith that Jacob displayed and which seems so difficult for us to appropriate is what we can call expectant faith: we expect that God will do as He has promised. We are told in the Scriptures that He can be trusted to do as He has promised. And what He has promised is clear: He will always be with us.

"We know," as the Holy Apostle Paul affirms, "that God works in all things for good for those who love Him." (*Romans 8:28*) He is working for our good. We often cannot see it or understand it, but we are not called to understanding but to trust. By looking at the circumstances of life, we usually will not see God's presence; but by placing our trust in His promise, we can come to see His presence as outweighing these circumstances.

The Old Testament patriarch Jacob was often on the run: from his brother and from his father-in-law. And yet he seemed aware of the presence and protection of God. On this second day of Palm Week, Jacob reminds us that God is always present to us even in deprivation, or tragedy, or in our weaknesses and failures. "The Lord will answer you in the time of distress; the name of the God of Jacob will defend you." (*Psalms 20:1*)

SCRIPTURE READINGS: Isaiah 49:6-10
Genesis 31:3-16
Proverbs 21:3-21