

Renewal of the Covenant Twelfth Week in Ordinary Time Wednesday, June 22, 2016
8:15 AM **2 Kgs 22:8-13; 23:1-3;** Mt 7:15-20 (St. John Fisher, bishop and St. Thomas More, martyrs; St. Paulinus of Nola, bishop) (In every crisis God comes to us and tries to reawaken the sense of meaning and purpose that was originally the idea of the covenant.)

I cannot pass over this reading from the Second Book of Kings without comment because it really is very significant. What is significant about it is that it describes something that is actually almost impossible to believe, but probably is true. It's a story about how someone found a scroll of the Law in the Temple, and said, oh, look what I found. Now I agree that I have occasionally gone to my closet and found something I forgot I put in there. But how could anyone **mislay the Law for a long period of time so that everyone forgot about it?** But that's what this story is about.

Now probably the scroll they are talking about is **the Book of Deuteronomy**. The word *Deuteronomy* means "second law." It isn't really a second law; it's a second rendition of the Law. So we have the original book, although at this time it hadn't been a book yet, Exodus, the traditions of Exodus. But then we have Leviticus and Numbers all filling out the story of the covenant and the stipulations of the Lord and so on. Then it's reprised, resumed, in Deuteronomy. This is probably what they are talking about, the Book of Deuteronomy.

But what the story is indicating is that **for some time people had been operating without the Law**. Now what was the religion of Israel without the Law? That is a very good question. It was a religion. They were worshiping God. They were doing things in the name of God. They had a Temple. They had a priesthood. **What were they doing without a law?** Good question! The answer probably is something like they were following customs, maybe in a sort of mechanical way, not too much aware of what they were doing, **maybe imitating the world around them basing their actions and rituals on what they saw the other Canaanites doing**—maybe. Maybe that's the whole idea here.

In the two Books of Kings only two kings are called righteous. One is Hezekiah here; the other is Josiah. Both of them begin a renewal, a radical renewal movement. Here it starts with, oh my goodness, God gave us a Law and we don't even know what it's about. So then he calls together the people and reads it all to them, and this is a **beginning of a time of renewal**.

Now what else is going on at that time, we are not one hundred percent sure. But you can be sure it was **a period of great transition. And very possibly this was around the time when**

the northern kingdom had already fallen. You read about Sennacherib yesterday, how he was chased away, yes; well that didn't stay. Eventually the northern kingdom fell, and this is either right before or right after that. So looking back historically it's a time of crisis, and **into the crisis comes this new awareness of the Law of God** and of God's stipulations, God's requirements. And **at this particular time everyone seems to be willing to listen to what it is and do it.**

Now I think really this is put in the Bible to tell us that this is part of the modality of people. **People tend to forget what they are supposed to be doing.** They tend to get into ruts, and then the ruts become holy. Oh we can't; oh that's what we do; oh we always do this, this is holy. But it doesn't even connect to the meaning of anything. **The Law is about meaning.** You are a special people. You have a special relation with God. **You have a covenant, and you have responsibilities that come from that.** And you better be loyal and faithful to that, otherwise there is no point to it.

So we can parallel that with the Christian church today. **Many people in the Christian church today have lost the meaning of the gospel.** Some continue in a sort of mechanical way doing certain things they've always done; others have given up. This is a period of crisis. We had them before; we will have them again. **The answer to every crisis is openness to God.** In every crisis God comes to us and tries to reawaken the sense of meaning and purpose that was originally the idea of the covenant.

Jesus renewed that covenant at the expense of his own life and blood to reveal something that otherwise the Law itself can never reveal: namely, God's deep love and concern for every human being, to realize that someone is willing to die for you or your well-being, your life, to save you, to save your life. Whatever that is, itself is very moving. St. Paul talks about how moving that is if it were just somebody. But it isn't just somebody; **it's actually God incarnate that has come to die to save the beloved.** And the beloved are **everybody who wants to be beloved. So it's a very powerful message of renewal.** But every age will have its own problems. And this is an age of a very particular kind of crisis in the world, where things are just collapsing, the fabric of society pulling apart everywhere: Europe, Japan, China, India, the US, South America—pulling apart. And **we need something, some meaning for us to get going in the right direction, a renewal of the covenant**—that's what's called for.