

Third Tuesday of Lent ~ 3/13

"And now with all our heart we follow you; we fear you and seek your presence. Do not put us to shame, but deal with us in your patience and in your abundant mercy. Deliver us in accordance with your marvelous works, and bring glory to your name, O Lord." (Daniel 3:41-43)

In this selection from Daniel, we read but two verses from a long song in which Azariah blesses the Lord, even though he is standing in a furnace with flames rising around him on every side. Old King Nebuchadnezzar sentenced him to death because he would not fall down and worship a golden statue. Perhaps Azariah was able to stand courageously amid these earthly flames because there was a blaze inside him that was hotter than any earthly fire. It would seem that Azariah was consumed with the burning presence of the Spirit of God.

Remember those ashes that we buried on the first day of Lent, the ones that would become nutrients to grow the love of God in the secret and sacred places of the heart? Today is a good day to catch a glimpse of exactly what we are nurturing. Like looking at a package of seeds that offer a picture of what the vegetable will look like when it grows to maturity, today we can see what might rise from the ashes of our lives. The resemblance to Azariah is striking.

The courage, the joy and the steadfast faith of Azariah is part of what we are trying to grow this Lent. Azariah didn't get pushed into this furnace. He walked in freely knowing that whatever happened God would take care of him. A lifetime of growing culminates in this moment. He is prepared and his song of praise tells us that he understands who has grown the joy in his heart.

If we desire to love God as faithfully as Azariah then we must stop worshipping our golden statues, sacred cows, those things that have become the focus of much of our energy. We all have them whether we wish to admit it or not. They can be obvious like the luxury home or car, or they can be more insidiously wrapped around our hearts in the guise of things like patriotism, political agendas or social acceptance.

Naming these golden idols and turning our backs on them is one of the surest ways to draw ridicule and hatred of the world around us. It is also one of the fastest ways to grow something wonderful for God out of the ashes of our failures. Like Azariah, are we ready to take the heat?

Questions for Reflection

- 1. What sacred cows do I still hold dear? Who commands my attention more than God?*
- 2. Am I able to sing songs of praise to God even in my hardships?*