Week 2: King Saul

Monday - 1 Samuel 8

Today we read 1 Samuel 8, and in this chapter, we are taken out of the era of the Judges and into the era of the Kings. The Israelites go to Samuel and demand from him a king. Samuel is, of course, not happy with this. On the one hand, if they want a king, so that means that God is NOT their king. God has been leading them since they came out of Egypt - and now they want a king "like the other nations?" On the other hand, he also probably felt rejected because he is the judge and they tell him "make us a king to judge us like all the nations." And this is why the Lord told him "they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me."

But Samuel despite his displeasure, turns to the Lord and prays. And the Lord tells him to heed the voice of the people. First, warn them about what it means to have a king, and what the bad behavior of the kings will be, and then if they still want a king, give them one.

The Lord, in his foreknowledge, had planned for this. If we open Deuteronomy 17, there's a section in the Law of Moses about kings and the principles governing kings. You can read it in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, but I'll summarize it here.

1. "a king whom the Lord your God chooses"
2. "one from among your brethren; not a foreigner"
3. "not multiply horses or cause the people to return to Egypt"
4. "not multiply wives for himself"
5. "not multiply silver and gold for himself"
6. He should write for himself a copy of the Law of Moses from the one before the priests and it shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes.

The role of the king was meant to be a spiritual leader of the people. If he walked in all of God's commandments and observed them, then the people would follow him. But if he didn't... if he introduced idol worship, or if he became distracted by many wars, or distracted by women or by money, then he would lead the people astray.

Unfortunately, most of the kings that will reign over Israel will fall short of these requirements. Some will be good - not perfect, but good - like King David. Some kings will start out bad and repent - like King Manasseh. Some kings will start out good and get worse - like King Saul, who we will read about in tomorrow's chapter.

Don't forget to read the Scripture. God bless you.

Tuesday - 1 Samuel 9

Today we read 1 Samuel 9!

This chapter describes the anointing of Saul as King of Israel.

His father's donkeys were lost and so he went out to find them, and in going out to find them, he will find Samuel and Samuel will anoint him as king. The Lord uses the small events in our day-to-day to bring about His will in our life. St Basil says: "God uses every opportunity to call us to work. The donkeys were lost so that a king for Israel might be found." The little things in my life, I may not regard them - but when I start to see the will of God in my life, I will start to see these little events as being from God. When you see a Teta and she says "Inshallah" (God willing) and "Noshkor Rabena" (thank God) and "Rabena Yostor" (God forbid) for every little thing. It's because she is recognizing those small events - even if they seem bad (like the donkeys getting lost) - she recognizes that they are in God's hand.

One of the exercises that we can do is to accustom ourselves to this language - to putting every small event in God's hand. To attributing every goodness to God. How are you? I am doing well, thank God. Are you going to this event? God willing, yes. Did you hear about the accident? May God have mercy.

Saul was a Benjamite, described as the most handsome person among the children of Israel, and taller than all the people. So the donkeys are lost, and after passing through several lands, he told his servant "let's go back lest my father stop worrying about the donkeys and start worrying about us." And his servant said - let's go see the prophet first! So Saul asked how can we go empty handed? We need something to offer the prophet! They went and eventually found Samuel, and Samuel had known from the Lord that Saul would be the king. So Samuel speaks to him very honorably and reserves a seat for him and a choice portion of meat for him. So Saul asks - "Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak to my like this?"

Look at all of these good qualities of Saul! He was concerned for his father and didn't want him to worry. He was generous towards the man of God, wanting to offer him a gift. He was humble and recognized his insignificance among the rest of Israel. Saul started off really good. And we'll see that for the next few chapters. He is good - he attributes victory to God, he didn't go out to battle without Saul, he led the people in the fear of God.

But it doesn't matter how you start, as much as how you end. Saul's end will not be good. He will stop attributing victory to the Lord. He will stop seeking the Lord's guidance. He will disobey God and God's commandments. The power gets to his head in pride. And he will die an ugly death.

If right now, I feel I am good - I go to church, I come to youth meeting, maybe I serve... maybe even I pray the Agpeya every day. But let me always be watchful for my salvation. Let me cultivate my PERSONAL relationship with God. Let me prepare for the day that my faith is doubted. Let me prepare for the day that I will endure a hardship or tribulation. Let me prepare for the day that I start to feel lazy. I ALWAYS need to be watchful because the devil is always working against me. And may the Lord fill us with His grace and wisdom.

My beloved, one of the important ways to be watchful is to read the Scripture every day and to meditate on it. I hope that you are all reading along according to our schedule.

God bless you

Wednesday - 1 Samuel 10

Today we read 1 Samuel 10.

King Saul is anointed as king, and then publicly revealed as king by a casting of lots done by Samuel.

Samuel anoints King Saul as a king with oil. The anointing oil was used in those days to anoint kings, prophets and priests. And until today, oil is used to consecrate our churches, our altars, our altar vessels, and most importantly - Christians. We are ALL consecrated with the oil of the Myron on the day of our baptism. Consecration means to be set apart… in the case of Saul, he was set apart from the rest of Israel to serve as their King and their leader. To guide them before the Lord. In our case, we are consecrated and set apart from the rest of the world in our actions, our language, the places we go to, the media we consume, in our self-control, etc.

After being anointed, Samuel tells Saul to go home and on his way home, he will encounter three signs. I will challenge you to go and read and figure out what these three signs are, and what the meanings or contemplations behind them are.

What I want to focus on here, is the virtue of discernment. King Saul, when he arrived back at his father's house, he told his father about the donkeys and about Samuel, but he did NOT mention the anointing or the kingdom. And this is a lesson we can learn from Samuel - the lesson of discernment.

We live in a time when we are encouraged to share share share… companies want our data, AIs need data to train on, we are glued to social media which cannot survive without people to share on it. At the same time, we feel like we have to know everything about everyone… but do we use discernment in what we share, when we share it, or with whom we share it?

King Saul wisely did not tell his father or ANYONE ELSE about the kingdom because it was not his to tell. It was for Samuel to announce to the people and to make it public. Had he publicized, maybe one of the larger tribes would have been upset because he's from the smallest tribe. Maybe they wouldn't believe him because they didn't hear it from Samuel. Maybe they wouldn't believe it's from God and think he's taking it for himself. But he used discernment.

We, too, dear beloved, let us be discerning in what information we share with each other. Private information about myself or my family - that's not for everyone to know. Private information about someone else - that's not for ANYONE to know. If I am discerning an important decision, it's not good for me to go and ask EVERYONE for advice. But I take some select people who are mature and guided by the Holy Spirit and seek their advice. If I am asked to serve in a certain capacity, why do I go and tell everyone about it? Let me take the blessing of the hidden service. Or I am taking an exam that will decide if I go forward or not… why do I tell everyone? And then if I don't pass the exam, I am embarrassed in front of them, or they ask me "what happened?? Why didn't you go forward?" And I can't find an answer. Let us be discerning in what information we share with each other, and take this lesson from Saul.

God bless you, dear beloved, make sure you are reading the Scripture!

Thursday - 1 Samuel 11

In this chapter, we see King Saul's first action as king. He has been anointed king by Samuel and declared king publicly, also by Samuel, but he is not yet accepted by the people as their king. But after this episode, he will be.

The Ammonites are camped around Jabesh Gilead - an Israelite city. And the inhabitants of the city know they are outnumbered and that they would be defeated by the Ammonites. So rather than fight, they tried to make a covenant. But the leader of the Ammonites offered them one condition in a covenant - that he plucks out all of their right eyes.

Here I want to meditate on this… it was common pagan practice to take out the eyes, because without eyes (and especially the right eye), you could not fight. This is what happened to Samson in the time of the Judges! A soldier would hold his shield with his left hand, covering his body and the left half of his face. And with his right hand, he would hold his sword or his weapon and he would see with his right eye. Without his right eye, he would either have to go without a shield and leave himself unprotected, or go without seeing. So gouging the eyes would be a very humiliating and emasculating act, and it was a way to keep their subjects subject to them.

Whenever we see an enemy tribe or nation or kingdom going against Israel in the Old Testament, we can usually interpret that in a spiritual interpretation as representing the devil. The Ammonites, the Hittites, the Perezites, the Canaanites, the Philistines, Pharaoh and the Egyptians - all of these pagan nations in the interpretation of the Old Testament, represent Satan. So what is the meaning of this?

Gouging the eyes symbolizes the loss of one's spiritual insight, and this is what Satan tries to do with the believers. After a long period away from the Church or away from the Scripture or away from the life of prayer, I start to lose spiritual insight. For example, maybe after I confess, I wake up in the morning and I pray… and after a few days, I wake up in the morning and I remember to pray but I don't. And then after a long time of doing this, I wake up in the morning and I don't even remember to pray. Slowly, my spiritual eye is being gouged out by my lukewarmness and my distance from God.

Another example, in my youth, there are certain sins that I knew were clearly wrong and I would NEVER do them. But then I was tempted, and I fell into sin - but I knew it was wrong and I felt remorse. After a while of continuing to fall, without going to confession and without seeking guidance, I start to do this sin and feel no remorse. After a while, I would not even admit that it is wrong - maybe I justify myself. After a while, I might even claim that it is RIGHT and teach it to others. This is a sign that my spiritual eye is being gouged out by Satan.

Let us be careful, my beloved, to keep close to the Church and keep close to the Word of God, and keep close to the Sacraments. The Sacraments are light in our life - light that shines our spiritual eyes.

King Saul hears about the Ammonite proposal and is furious, and the Scripture tells us that the Spirit of God came upon him. He takes two oxen, cuts them in pieces and sends the pieces throughout Israel, telling the people - if you don't join Saul and Samuel in this battle, this will be done to your oxen.

Again, we see the virtue of King Saul in the beginning of his kingship - nothing is done without God, and without Samuel as God's prophet. And all victories are attributed to God. The people join him and they destroy the Ammonites. And they accept him as their king.

Read the Scripture!

Friday - 1 Samuel 12

In this chapter, Samuel gathers the people to give them some notes about their new king.

He starts by verifying his integrity with the people. I haven't abused my authority, I haven't taken anything from anyone, I haven't accepted any bribes. And the people affirm his integrity. He is innocent and he is just - and in this way, again, he is a type of Christ. Remember when the Lord said: "which of you convicts me of sin?" in John 8.

This speech signifies the end of his role as Judge - the end of his political role. Now he will devote himself to giving spiritual guidance and leave ruling to the king. At the same time, he is using the point about his integrity to be a model for the new king. Just as I have served you, let this new king serve you.

He reminds them of the times of the Exodus and how the Lord delivered them through Moses and Aaron. He reminds them of the times of the Judges and how the Lord delivered them through Jerubbaal (Gideon), Bedan (Barak), Jephthah and Samson. And he links the battle from 1 Samuel 11 back to this and says that the Lord delivered them through their new king. You looked for someone to be king over you instead of looking to God as your king… but there is still hope for you. Keep God's commandments.

The message here is for all of us: God loves you, protects you, cares for you and provides for you - so keep His commandments. Fill yourself with His presence. Attach yourself to Him.

Finally, the speech ends with Samuel promising to pray for them - even considering it a sin if he does not. Pray for your brothers and sisters around you - when you see someone falling in sin, instead of judging them, lift up your heart in prayer for them, that their heart may be softened and their eye redirected to the Lord who loves them.

God bless you

Saturday - 1 Samuel 13

Sunday - 1 Samuel 14

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