

1st Sunday of Lent

February 21, 2010

“For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.”

—Romans 10: 10.

The children’s classic, “The Velveteen Rabbit”, chronicled the story of a stuffed rabbit and the boy who received it as a Christmas gift. At first, the simple toy was snubbed by the other, more expensive and sophisticated mechanical toys that flaunted their complexity and regarded themselves as real.

When the rabbit asked if being “real” means “having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle, the Skin Horse replied, “Real isn’t how you are made. It’s a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but really loves you, then you become real.” “Does it hurt?” asked the rabbit. “Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are real, you don’t mind being hurt.” “Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,” he asked, “or bit by bit?” “It doesn’t happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t happen to those who break easily, or have sharp edges, or have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are real, most of your hair has been loved off and your eyes drop out and you get loose in your joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are real, you can’t be ugly except to people who don’t understand.”

With the beginning of yet another Lenten season, the praying assembly, gathered around the sacred texts and nourished by the food of bread and word, is once again invited – collectively and individually – to “get real.” Becoming “real” is a lifelong process. It means that we have attained authenticity, that our thoughts and

words and actions are truthfully integrated. Our yes is yes; our no is no. What we confess with our mouth is consistent with the manner in which we live our lives. We don't send mixed messages because there is no dichotomy between saying and doing, thinking and being, believing and confessing.

Saying what we mean and meaning what we say is the key to becoming real. So is the willingness to accept that all who confess the same Lord become related to one another as brothers and sisters. Those who persevere in the process of becoming real have to work daily at cleansing their hearts and actions of prejudice and discrimination, as well as apathy, which allows such injustice to go unchecked.

Becoming real will require each of us to stand and listen as Moses tells the story of who we are as people. As we remember our ancestors in faith and their experiences, both good and bad, we are urged to be similarly truthful about our own lives. We speak our own story before God and our sisters and brothers in the faith, and we are challenged to acknowledge the good that we have done and the good we have failed to do. We take our cue from Jesus: becoming real will mean that we admit our weaknesses and vulnerability and offer these to God, who will grace us with the strength to face every temptation.

Becoming real will require us to be honest about our sharp edges, our excessive sensitivity and fragility, and our desire to be carefully kept. Recalling the wisdom of the Skin Horse, believers should be prepared for the consequences of becoming real. We must be willing to let our hair be loved off through dedicated service, to accept that our joints may get loose; we may take on a shabby look when we attend more to needs of others than to our own. Even though it hurts to become fully who we are called by God to be, it is important for us to make a new beginning. The process of becoming real doesn't happen all at once. What better time to start than now?

Readings:

Deuteronomy 26: 4-10

www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy26.htm#v4

Psalm 91: 1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15

www.usccb.org/nab/bible/psalms/psalm91.htm#v1

Romans 10: 8-13

www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans10.htm#v8

Luke 4: 1-13 www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke4.htm#v1