

Lent Devotional March 22, 2020

Scripture

Romans 8:11-25

11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. 12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—13 for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” 16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. 18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; 20 for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Devotional

Robert Benedetto '77, Academia (2013)

Lamia Al-Gailani Werr, Iraq's first female archaeologist and a curator at the National Museum of Iraq, died last year at the age of 80. Her expertise was Mesopotamian cylinder seals, and she curated a collection of 7,000, along with other priceless artifacts. The museum's collections documented 7,000 years of human history, including the Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian civilizations. After the U.S. military invaded Iraq in 2003, the Iraq Museum was looted, and everything was lost.

The cultural catastrophe continued between 2014 and 2015, when the Islamist group Isis plundered or destroyed at least 28 religious buildings in Iraq and Syria, including tombs, mosques, and shrines. Two such buildings were the traditional tombs of the biblical prophet Jonah in Nineveh, just outside Mosul, and the façade of the Roman theatre in the city of Palmyra.

For those who care about the origins of human civilization, the ancient Near East, and the Bible, the past two decades have been years of unprecedented cultural loss. When the Iraq Museum reopened in 2015, only one-third of its estimated 15,000 pieces had been recovered.

This great cultural “dying” of the last two decades has been accompanied by a corresponding “dying” of the natural world. Romans 8 reminds us that “the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth” (v. 22). In our time, we might understand this earthly “groaning” in the context of climate change, a force affecting planet earth with significant implications for civilization as we know it. The “groaning” comes in many forms: melting glaciers and rising seas, more frequent and deadlier floods, fires, storms, heatwaves, droughts, hurricanes. Air pollution, crop failure, water scarcity, reduced biodiversity. It all seems so apocalyptic. And yet . . . “in hope we were saved,” and “we ourselves . . . have the first fruits of the Spirit.”

Prayer

In times such as these, O God, we wait in Lenten apprehension and hope, longing for the preservation of humanity, the restoration of your creation, and the redemption of both through the sustaining and transforming presence of your Holy Spirit in our hearts and in our world. We “groan inwardly” as we wait for our full and complete adoption as sons and daughters of your Kingdom and for the New Creation you have promised. Amen.