Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: Men of Faith

In the Book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar asks three devout men to worship a false god. And if they don’t, he will throw them into a fiery furnace to torture and kill them. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have complete faith and trust in God. They know that God can save them from any danger. They choose salvation from God over the sin of idolatry.

Furious at their refusal, King Nebuchadnezzar orders the fiery furnace to be heated seven times as hot before the men are tied up and thrown in. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego rejoice in the one true God and once thrown into the white-hot furnace, they walk about in the flames as if there was no danger at all. They spend time in prayer acknowledging their own sinfulness and the greater love and mercy of God which can overcome any evil. Then they sing to God and bless the Lord. One line from their song reads, “Fire and heat, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever” (Daniel 3:66). The Lord responds to the faith of the three and not only protects them but joins them in the furnace.

The evil king is duly impressed and reverses course completely. He orders the three men to be taken out of the furnace and unbound. “The fire had had no power over the bodies of these men; not a hair of their heads had been singed, nor were their garments altered; there was not even a smell of fire about them” (3:95). Then King Nebuchadnezzar praises the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and believes “there is no other God who can rescue like this” (3:96).

In a day or two, the number of coronavirus infections world-wide will exceed 1 million. Deaths will number over 50,000. This pandemic of biblical proportions is more deadly than the fiery furnace that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego faced. Is there a lesson to be learned from this Old Testament story of faith?

When your faith is tested, are you prone to bowing to pressure, to renounce your faith, or to give in to something you know is clearly wrong? Is not the wiser choice to align ourselves with God? White hot furnaces are used in the refining of gold. All the impurities are melted away and the pure gold is poured into molds. When it cools, it is valued like no other precious metal on earth.

Amidst the isolation that we are all experiencing, we may feel as tied up as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. But we are only as alone as we allow ourselves to be. God wants to be with us especially when times are difficult. He has given us guardian angels to watch over us and protect us. He has given us his Word and we can reflect on it whenever we read the bible or meditate on a short passage or verse. The Lord entered the fiery furnace with the three. Doesn’t this story from the Old Testament remind us of Jesus’ promise in the Gospel of Matthew: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (18:20).

Like the three men in the furnace, this is a good time to acknowledge our own sinfulness and the greater love and mercy of God. Jesus conquered sin and death. He can help us with any cross in our own lives. So, let us sing to God and bless his name.

Bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.
For he has delivered us from [Hell], and saved us from the power of death;
He has freed us from the raging flame and delivered us from the fire.
Give thanks to the Lord, who is good, whose mercy endures forever (Dn 3:88-89).

The power of God is stronger than any virus. If the evil King Nebuchadnezzar could be impressed by the faith of three men protected by God in the fiery furnace, then we must also believe that God will use this pandemic to help the most hardened of hearts to repent and to praise God. As King Nebuchadnezzar did, let us all acknowledge: “there is no other God who can rescue like this” (3:96).

How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders;
his kingship is an everlasting kingship,
and his dominion endures through all generations (Dn 3:100).