

February 14, 2018 (Ash Wednesday) Return To Sender Homily: One of the most legendary recording artists in the history of rock and roll music is the late Elvis Presley. Many of his songs reached the top of the charts and, as a result, he earned the reputation as being one of the most popular entertainers in the second half of the twentieth century. In his career he amassed an enormous sum of money. In view of the first two readings for Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of the penitential season of Lent, one of his songs deserves mention. It is the number one hit, "Return to Sender". The words of the song speak of a lover's persistent pursuit of his beloved and her rather chilly response to his romantic overtures.

"I gave a letter to a postman. He put in his sack. Bright and early the next day he brought the letter back. She wrote upon it 'return to sender; address unknown... no such number, no such zone.' We had a quarrel, a lover's spat. I wrote I'm sorry, but my letters kept coming back".

One Christian scholar whose name escapes me sums up salvation history in three short words: a love story. Many years ago, the late Bishop Sheen wrote a book about the divine romance. God is a lover, and he is unrelenting in his pursuit of his beloved, Israel, even though he is oftentimes rebuffed and betrayed by His heart's desire. His Word goes unheeded and is even ignored. It is as if the words of Presley's song were adopted... return to sender. His love letter remains unopened!

Our first reading is from the prophet Joel. His inspired words are set in a time of crisis... a defining moment for the chosen people. Twice in our reading does Joel implore his people to return to the Lord. "Return to the Lord, your God" (Joel 2:13) and "Return to me with your whole heart" (Joel 2:12) The word "return" is frequently used in the Old Testament for a turning away from evil and a turning to God.

In his letter to the Christian community at Corinth (2nd reading) Paul pleads with the Corinthians to return and "...be reconciled to God". (2Cor.5:20)

In our Lenten journey of forty days, we have a destination in mind. We are on the way to the Lord himself. This season reminds us that we, at times, stray from the path chosen for us by the Divine Word. For us Catholics, Lent is a defining moment. We are called upon to re-examine our conscience and be honest with ourselves. It is no secret that in our secular, unbelieving age, too many have ceased practicing the faith. Even worse, some have abandoned the faith altogether.

"Now is an acceptable time", declares St. Paul. "Now is the day of salvation". (2 Cor.6:2) Let us seize the opportunity afforded us by the Church during this season of Lent to return to the Lord. Let this sacred time not go to waste. Let us be true ambassadors of Christ, "...God appealing through us". (2 Cor5:20)

Amen!