

04 Sunday of Lent
March 22, 2009
Fr. Tom Elliott

Happy Endings

2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23

Psalm 137

Ephesians 2:2-10

John 3:14-21

While I was on vacation last summer with Fr. Dave, we watched a movie on television. I had been flipping through the channels when I came across the movie, which featured some big-name stars. As we watched the movie, I became very engrossed in the plot. It seemed like a typical romantic comedy—two people meet, fell in love, and then went through a huge break up. As the movie was coming to an end, I knew the big finale must be fast approaching. It would be the moment when the man and woman would reconcile and live happily ever after. I was wrong.

The movie abruptly ended. It ended without the two main characters getting back together again. I was mad! I began complaining to Fr. Dave about it, “How could they end the movie in such a horrible way?” His response was, “Well, I knew it was coming because I’ve seen this movie before.” Then I was really mad! He could have spared me the pain of an unhappy ending, but didn’t!

Most of us *love* happy endings. That’s the reason why *good* movies always have happy endings. It’s the reason why our first reading today has a happy ending. The reading from Second Chronicles is a bit obscure for most of us. It is a book chronicling the reign of King Solomon. In the verses we heard today, at the end of the book, the author was lamenting the way God’s Chosen People had turned from Him and “added infidelity to infidelity, practicing all the abominations of the nations and polluting the LORD’S temple” (2 Chronicles 36:14). They had apparently rejected one prophet after the next by continuing to live a decadent lifestyle. It is on this dismal note that the original version of Second Chronicles ended. Thankfully, someone came along who liked happy endings as much as I do.

A later author appended Second Chronicles with two additional verses. These verses seem very much out of place with the rest of the book, but they do provide a happier ending to the story, with the king of Persia, Cyrus, proclaiming, “All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD, the God of heaven, has given to me, and he has also charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever, therefore, among you belongs to any part of his people, let him go up, and may his God be with him!” (2 Chronicles 36:24). As it turns out, the reason the verses seem out of place is because they were simply borrowed from the next book in the Bible—Ezra! These two verses are the beginning two verses in the next book of Scripture! While I appreciate the fact that someone changed Second Chronicles so that it would have a happier ending, it would have been nice if he would have been a little more creative!

If we want to hear a *really* happy ending to a story, then we only need to turn to today’s second reading and Gospel. Much like the beginning of our first reading, Saint Paul is aware of the sinfulness of God’s people. According to Paul, we were “dead in our transgressions” (Ephesians 2:5). It was in the midst of such a terrible reality that Christ was given to us as a gift

from God. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 4:8). Our Gospel reading talks about the reality of this awesome gift, the perfect ending, even more clearly—

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

-John 3:16-17

These Scripture verses are a wonderful reminder to us that the joy of this coming Easter is not about how “successful” we were in maintaining our Lenten observances, but rather, it is about the openness of our hearts to God’s amazing gift of His Son, our Eternal Salvation.

We are half way through the Season of Lent. This is a great time for us to be reminded of the source of our happy ending. In just a few more weeks, will we find ourselves depressed because we failed to keep our Lenten observances or will we be all-the-more grateful and joyful for God’s grace through Jesus Christ? It is our *gratitude* for this amazing Gift that makes us zealous in offering to God our Lenten observances. The happy ending to salvation history, then, is not dependent upon us, but upon the “Son of Man,” who was “lifted up” (John 3:14).