

Second Sunday of Lent

March 16, 2025

God's call is personal and at the same time very demanding. It is an invitation to enter into his holiness with an attitude of faith and total trust in the Divine. We encounter a God who speaks to us and we are called upon to listen to him and respond to him. During the season of Lent, he invites us to convert ourselves and become like him as he prepared himself for the mission of his Father.

As we now enter the Second Week of Lent, our task is to continue to examine our hearts and change ourselves in order to be worthy of his glorious paschal mystery.

Our First Reading from Genesis gives us part of the wonderful story of Abraham, a truly foundational story for three of the world's religions namely Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Abraham had just taken a remarkable journey. Motivated by God's call, Abraham (then, Abram) had packed up and left his homeland with his wife Sarah.

Together they journeyed far from home to Canaan and Egypt and all over the place. They seem to have been

simply motivated by their deep conviction that God was asking this of them, that they were simply responding in faith to the God who was leading them to a new land and a new life.

And this particular Scripture passage we just heard is known as the Covenant with Abraham, a sacred kind of “agreement” between God and him, one in which God promises him descendants as numerous as the stars, and also promises him the land he is occupying. The importance of this story in human history cannot be underestimated. The ripples from it still shape our world for good and bad. It’s just that powerful, that sacred, that foundational.

And what happens right after God promises Abraham these things? Something very human. Abraham needs something more. He needs to know that this is real, that he’s not mistaken, that he didn’t “hear” wrong. He needs some sort of reassurance.

And he gets it. This sacred covenant is depicted as being sealed by a very ancient tradition. Abraham takes some animals and cuts them up, an ancient sign basically saying, “If I don’t hold up my end of the bargain, let this

same thing happen to me.” And then a trance falls upon Abraham, and a terrifying darkness envelopes him.

When he awakes he sees a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch, all signs of God’s presence. These flames then pass between the rows of the cut up animals. In ancient times, that meant that the person was agreeing to the “terms”. In modern language we would say, ... God was signing on the dotted line.

I love the fact that Abraham needed some reassurance. Sometimes when we read these stories we get the idea that everything was crystal-clear to these people in terms of what God was asking of them. And that can make it hard to identify with them. And yet, we don’t need to presume that was the case.

In many ways, these men and women are just like you and me. They didn’t have all the answers. The path before them wasn’t always clearly lit. They had to wrestle with the big questions, had to try to figure out what God expected from them or was “saying” to them. They often wondered if they were doing the right thing. They had to wrestle with their consciences and try to figure out what was the right thing to do.

In other words, they were on the same spiritual journey as you and me, a journey sometimes filled with doubts and uncertainty. And sometimes they just needed a little reassurance.

I think there's a little bit of that going on in today's Gospel passage from Luke, what we simply call the Transfiguration. Peter, James, and John had been following this man Jesus for a while, they had been listening to his stories and his words of wisdom, and had witnessed some pretty unexplainable things. And yet, they probably still wondered if they were on the right path, if continuing to follow Jesus was still the right thing to do, was a truly faithful thing to do.

And they too needed a little reassurance. And they got it in the most dramatic way possible. If they were wavering at all before that day, the experience of the transfigured Jesus helped strengthen their commitment. They got the sign they needed. And they had to have left the mountain that day changed forever.

We all need reassurances. Kids need a hug and a kiss after they have been scolded. Employees need to be told by their bosses that they are doing a good job and are

valued. Students need some positive comments on their papers and not just a bunch of stuff crossed out in red ink.

People need to hear the words, "I forgive you," so that they don't have to wonder if they are or not. Men and women on the margins need to be heard and embraced and cared for, not treated as being invisible. And many couples feel compelled to renew their vows, feel the need to simply re-say the words and recommit to each other.

What does this have to do with Lent? Well, the reason the Church has different seasons throughout the year, the reason we revisit the same stories over and over again, the reason we participate in the same devotions again and again is because, like Abraham and Peter and James and John and countless others, we need that reminder, we need that reassurance, we need to feel that we are on the right path, we need to refocus from time to time on what is most important, and more importantly, where we are headed. Simply, we need signs along the way.

And our Lenten journey, our Lenten practices - our soup suppers, our Lenten devotions, help us to do that. They help to open our hearts and minds to a profound truth,

one stated beautifully by St. Paul in our Second Reading from his Letter to the Philippians:

“But our citizenship is in heaven.”

That’s where we belong. That’s our home. That’s why we were created, to dwell with God forever. And sometimes we simply forget that. Or think we have to “earn” our way. Or make so many of our decisions and choices as if this world, this earthly existence is all there is for us. St. Paul understood that well, describing some people in this way:

“Their minds are occupied with earthly things.”

And in a line that always makes me chuckle,

“Their God is in their belly.”

My dear friends, let’s do this Lent well. Let’s allow this holy season to speak to us, to be a kind of sign to us, that is, allow the journey of these forty days reassure us that we are on the right path, that our lives have meaning and purpose, that we have a destination beyond our wildest

imagination, that a place prepared for us by our God who loves us more than we can ever think of or imagine.

And when these forty days are over, when we wake up that Easter morning, may we come down the mountain changed not simply for a day, but forever just as Peter, James, and John were, ready to say whatever God wants us to say, and do whatever he asks us to do, and go wherever he invites us to go.