

Second Sunday of Lent C - God's Hidden Work in the World to fulfill His promise

March 13, 2022.

While it may be hard to imagine what life for Abraham was like, or even whether he was only a patriarchal ideal in the Old Testament, a careful reading of the passage from Genesis (First reading 15:5-12, 17-18) connects us to him with a contemporary question: how can we see God's promises at work in the world and be sure of their fulfillment? There is so much that makes us question whether God's will is at work. The twenty-four-hour news cycle carries with it death, violence, and dishonesty, so much that we despair of anything ever being different. For Abraham, it was the despair of not having any offspring. While this may seem old-fashioned, it was the faith of the people that their offspring, their blood heirs, assured them of an identity and the promise of a future that still exists in many parts of the world nowadays.

For many of us watching the news everyday, with the COVID-19 pandemic still continuing and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the question is will there even be a better world for our children to inherit? But God makes promises to each of us, and there are two that are particular to us as we observe the season of Lent. **The first is that we are all children of Abraham, and therefore inheritors of the promise, a covenant that God will always be our God, and our lives will be bound together with each other and with our Creator and Redeemer. The second promise is the gift of Jesus, God's son, who is our assurance of salvation and life eternal.** We are baptized into his death and resurrection, and we are reminded of that each Sunday when we partake of Jesus' risen body and blood at Communion.

This Sunday's readings help us to refocus on the spirituality in our lives, to refocus on the mystical. The mystery of God has entered human history in the covenant God made with this wandering Armenian, Abram, whom he now names Abraham. St. Paul tells the Philippians that they should not be like the Pharisees who are so concerned with Jewish dietary laws that "their God is their belly," and so proud of their circumcision that "their glory is in a shameful part of their body." The problem was that they were not allowing mystery, the mystical, to enter their lives. **"Our citizenship is in heaven,"** St. Paul says. The spiritual is what matters. We have to allow God to transform our minds by his spiritual reality. We cannot allow ourselves to be reduced to a mere external following of physical laws. The spiritual must reign and transform the world. God wants to transform the world. He has established the Kingdom of the Spirit and called us as the new Chosen People. Following him does not mean merely performing certain external actions, like not eating pork or being circumcised, or simply coming to Church, showing up to get married, having our children baptized, receiving communion or being confirmed. Following God means entering a spiritual, mystical relationship with him, a relationship that is present through our daily duties as well as when we are together at prayer.

In the Gospel reading from Luke (9:28b - 39), **'Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But he did not know what he was saying.'** This passage comes in the midst of the glorious event of the Transfiguration. Peter, James and John went up a high mountain with Jesus, and Jesus was suddenly transfigured before them. He was radiant white with light shining forth and He was speaking with Moses and Elijah. The three Apostles witness this miraculous event and they are so overwhelmed and awestruck that Peter just blurted out his suggestion of building three tents even though he had no idea what he was saying. We come upon Jesus at prayer on the Mountain. Even though the Transfiguration is presented in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, only Luke begins the account with the Lord at prayer. This is significant. The Lord is opening Himself to the presence of the Father. **At peace, at prayer, He is**

transformed, transfigured, into a state that reflects the glory of God. Moses and Elijah appear. They also are radiant, reflecting the glory of God. **Moses, the representative of the Books of the Law, Elijah, representing the Books of the Prophets, come to speak to Jesus, the very Word of God. They are speaking of God's plan for his people, the conquest of the spiritual.** One of the reasons that Jesus brings Peter, James, and John up the mountain is because they need to see a glimpse of Christ's divine glory. Just as Lent is bringing us closer to Christ's passion and death, so in St Luke's Gospel the Passion is drawing nearer. They are on the way to Jerusalem. Jesus knows that when his followers see him betrayed, scourged, and crucified, they will be shocked and disheartened. They don't know this, but he does. He knows they will need something to hang onto in those dark moments, something to give them hope and encouragement. This experience on the mountaintop is exactly that. It is meant to give them a deeper knowledge of Christ's greatness. This knowledge, this experience, will in turn enable them to persevere through the hard times ahead, and to help the other disciples persevere too. Of course, the disciples, Peter, James and John, don't understand this. They are still looking for a physical kingdom. The spiritual kingdom is beyond them. The voice in the cloud is meant for them and us: **"This is my Beloved Son, Listen to Him."** St. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians (Second reading 3:17 -4:1), tells us to remember where our true citizenship is and where we expect our help to come from. Then we have to start living like we believe it as we encourage one another along the way. The early Christians were courageous people; they had to be. There is no reason why we cannot imitate them.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God wants to do the same with us. Even better than a good coach, parent, or doctor, he knows what lies ahead for each one of us: the triumphs and the temptations, the successes and the struggles. He wants to equip us to get the most out of each of them. He wants to outfit us for each stage of our life's journey. But if we don't make room for prayer in our lives, he can't. If we don't go up the mountain with him and give him a chance to fill us with his grace, we won't be ready when the future comes. We have come to the beginning of Lent, and hopefully we will not allow ourselves to think of it as 'just another Lent'. There is a very deep sense in which there is not another Lent and then another and another after that. This Lent is unlike any other. It is this acceptable time. We do not know if there will be another Lent for us. Lent is a time to take heart, to bear one another's burdens with grace and care, to take care of ourselves so that we are strong for others, and to be witnesses to the promises made to Abraham, the patriarchs, matriarchs, and prophets who came before us. An old hymn summarizes it well: ***God is working his purpose out, as year succeeds to year, God is working his purpose out, and the time is drawing near, drawing nearer and nearer, the time that shall surely be, when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.*** Spiritually alive, living with God, united in the Holy Spirit, we can become the Divine Magnet for the world. We began today's Gospel with Jesus at prayer, in union with the Father, entering into the mystery of his Being. He is transfigured. The disciples call out, "It is good for us to be here." Yes it is. It is good for us all to be here in the presence of the Lord. We are also called into the mystery of our being, the depth of who we are where physical and spiritual unite. We are called into our depth, into union with the Holy Spirit so others might say, "It is good for us to be here." **Transform us Lord. Transfigure us, Lord. You want the spiritual to be real in our lives. You knock on the door of our hearts. Help us to let you in. Help us to fight for the reign of the spiritual, the mystical. Help us to be vehicles of your presence. Amen.**