

Second Sunday of Lent – Feb. 25, 2018 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Gen 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18

God put Abraham to the test. He called to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am!" he replied. Then God said: "Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you."

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. Then he reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the LORD's messenger called to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!" "Here I am!" he answered. "Do not lay your hand on the boy," said the messenger. "Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son." As Abraham looked about, he spied a ram caught by its horns in the thicket. So he went and took the ram and offered it up as a holocaust in place of his son.

Again the LORD's messenger called to Abraham from heaven and said: "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you acted as you did in not withholding from me your beloved son, I will bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore; your descendants shall take possession of the gates of their enemies, and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing - all this because you obeyed my command."

Psalm: Ps 116:10, 15, 16-17, 18-19

R. (116:9) I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.

I believed, even when I said,
"I am greatly afflicted."

Precious in the eyes of the LORD
is the death of his faithful ones.

R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.

O LORD, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your handmaid;
you have loosed my bonds.
To you will I offer sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and I will call upon the name of the LORD.

R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.

My vows to the LORD I will pay
in the presence of all his people,
in the courts of the house of the LORD,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.

R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:31b-34

Brothers and sisters: If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?

Who will bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who acquits us, who will condemn? Christ Jesus it is who died-or, rather, was raised-who also is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

Gospel: Mark 9:2-10

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them. Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified. Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; from the cloud came a voice, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them.

As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant.



Lenten Prayer

God our Father,
you know our weakness and sinfulness.
Stay close to us
through the difficulties and trials of life.
Keep us faithful during our Lenten practice, and
give us the grace
to pick up our daily crosses and follow after your
Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the
Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Probably I have told you this story before, but it bears on Sunday's readings. The incident happened a long time ago, just before I was ordained. For some reason which I cannot remember I had been chosen, as yet unordained, to give the Easter Vigil homily at the hugely packed College Church at Saint Louis University. There was a complication, of course. I was scheduled to be on my ordination retreat at the very same time. So I rode with four other Jesuits from the retreat place way out in the countryside, into the city, into the church, into the sacristy, into an alb and out to the altar. Need I say that I was very nervous since I had only given a few homilies before in my life. It happened that a huge thunderstorm had struck just the night before. I had watched it from the six-foot high glass doors of the retreat house. If you are not from the Midwestern part of the United States, you may not know the brutality of our storms. Dark rain pouring, volcanic lightning flashes blistering forth in naked power. Every single smallest detail of the landscape visible for seconds, as if twenty thousand florescent lights had suddenly flashed on and then off again. The tremendous power humbled me about my upcoming duties. Its radiation reminded me of what God told the prophet: "Do not look at me directly as I pass by; the sight is too much for your eyes." We are too small, in other words.

Easter Vigil had a much more humane version of light. The big Candle was lighted from a fire at the back and then the large assembly lit their small tapers gradually from the one Easter flame. Because I was in the sanctuary I could witness the soft light spreading forth from these countless miniature candles, combining the crowd into a gentle oneness, a hearth of faces. Wrinkles forgiven, comforting glow making each face a vessel which held deep inside itself the quiet light of the Lord. Such a contrast: thunderous power followed so quickly by the warmth and tenderness of small light. It enacted the true contrast between God's transcendent greatness—too much for human eyes—and Jesus' peaceful love. He absolved wrinkles and crippled legs and unseeing eyes, our glimpse of the awe-filled intensity of God-the-infinite through our tiny, finite eyes. Jesus is God as one of us. He is lightning turned into candle glow.

Alright, you say, that is very interesting, but what about this week's Gospel? Ok, in the Transfiguration, Jesus the small light reversed himself and showed up as God the infinite fire. My meager encounter with lightning was nothing compared to this. Why did such a frightening transformation take place? One appealing speculation would be that Jesus needed to show them (and us) the true connection of light to light. At the very center of each bolt of lightning is the same stuff that gently covers our faulty faces and makes them glow. God cannot unmake himself and put out the light that he is. But he can filter it and offer it to anyone who will look ... and occasionally remove the veil so we don't forget what we are seeing.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. In Genesis 15:5 God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. It is to this promise that Abraham clings as he raises the knife to kill his son. Where do you fall on the continuum when blind trust is required of you, with 1 being low and 10 being high?
2. The Old Testament describes "Emmanuel," as God with us. This reading says God is not only with us, but for us. "Christ indeed intercedes for us." Explain how this statement could be a real antidepressant.
3. Pope Francis speaks about the Transfiguration. In his view, what needs to happen when we climb the mountain? "*Come down from the mountain? We all need to go apart, to ascend the mountain in a space of silence, to find ourselves and better perceive the voice of the Lord. This we do in prayer. But we cannot stay there! Encounter with God in prayer inspires us anew to "descend the mountain" and return to the plain where we meet many brothers weighed down by fatigue, sickness, injustice, ignorance, poverty both material and spiritual*".

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

O God, who have commanded us to listen to your beloved Son, be pleased, we pray, to nourish us inwardly by your word, that, with spiritual sight made pure, we may rejoice to behold your glory. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen