

**The Second Sunday of Lent; March 15 & 16, 2014**

**Matthew 17:1-9**

The readings today may seem a bit odd for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent; a time we generally think of as being focused on repentance and preparation for Easter, but I hope you will see the message for today, although one of challenge, is also one of encouragement, and reassurance. Our First reading gives us the story of the “Call of Abram”. Now Abram comes to us, sort of out of nowhere, in the Book of Genesis. We are told he is a descendant of Shem, who was one of Noah’s sons. He has been living in the Land of Ur of the Chaldeans, what is now modern day Iraq. God calls Abram, whose name will later be changed to Abraham, and tells him to go from his country, from his kindred, and from his Father’s house to a land God will show him. This is a key moment in “Salvation History”. The term “Salvation History” refers to the plan God set in motion to restore the relationship between Himself and humanity that was broken by the Fall of Adam. Salvation History is God’s plan, in time, to bring about our salvation. God initiates his saving action by telling Abram that He will bless him, and that he will be a blessing, but also in this call, God makes three distinct promises to Abram:

1. That he will make of him a great nation.
2. That he will make his name great.
3. That by Abram, all the nations of the world will be blessed.

Later in the Book of Genesis, God will formalize these promises into covenants, but what we hear today is that initialization of God’s rescue plan for us. That rescue plan will become the nation of Israel. This is what makes them the chosen people. They were chosen, by God, to bring blessing and salvation to all the world. We can see, in a way, how the first two of these promises are fulfilled in the nation and Kingdom of Israel. Abram’s descendents do become a great nation, the nation of Israel, and in the ancient world the idea of a great name would have been associated with a great king. We can see the promise of a great name then being fulfilled

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through the lives of Israel's great Kings David and Solomon. What the Old Testament seems to have left out, is how the third promise will be fulfilled; the promise that all the nations of the world would be blessed through Abram.

This brings us to today's Gospel reading, the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ. The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ is the "Confirmation" of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of that promise of universal blessing. Jesus is the One. He is the One we should be looking to. He is the One we should be striving to follow. It is through Him that all the world will be blessed. We can look back at 2000 years of Church history and see how the Gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ has indeed gone out to the four corners of the world.

Now, of course, that work is far from finished, because many still do not know Christ as the One, and it is very much the mission of everyone here in this Church to bring Christ to those who do not yet know him. We should be carrying out this work with great confidence, because everything in this Gospel reading points out that Jesus is the answer to the promise. Jesus brings the leaders of his disciples Peter, James, and John to the top of a mountain where they see his face and clothes shining like the sun, revealing his glory and divinity. The appearance of Moses, the great Law giver, points to Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Covenant and the completion of the Law. The appearance of Elijah, the holy prophet, points to Jesus as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies. Finally, we have what the theologians call a theophany, the manifestation of, or the appearance of God in time. On this mountaintop we see the Holy Trinity revealed; Jesus, the beloved Son, is glorified; the bright cloud that overshadows them all is the Holy Spirit; and the voice we hear from the cloud is God the Father.

It is not very often in the Gospels that the Father speaks, so it is important that we pay attention here to what he says. What does he tell us? He tells us who Jesus is. He tells us that

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Jesus is his beloved Son, with whom He is well pleased. The message is clear; Jesus is the One, the One Israel has been waiting for, the One who will fulfill the promise to Abram, and bring God's blessing to the world. The next part of the message is also critically important for each of us, because the Father is telling us, now, what we need to do. What does the Father tell us we need to do? He tells us we need to listen to his Son.

I would like to try to give you some reasons for why you should listen to Jesus, and what listening to Jesus might look like in your life. One reason for listening to him, that I just tried to explain, is Jesus is the culmination of the plan God set in motion to restore right relationship between Himself and us. It is not unreasonable to ask why God would even concern Himself with having any kind of relationship with us. It makes no sense. He has no need for us. He is complete within Himself. Why would he concern Himself with all the messiness, suffering, and pain involved with any kind of human relationship? The only comprehensible answer - is that He is love, and love doesn't need to make any sense, but love does need to be shared. The love he has for us is not some generic kind of love for all humanity; His love is the love of an all-good Father for each and every one of His children.

Our Father in heaven wants each of us to be in right relationship with Him, because He wants what any good parent wants for their child; He wants what is best for them. He wants each and every one of us to live lives that are full of meaning and purpose. He wants us to become the men and women He created us to be. The evangelist Matthew Kelly calls this becoming the "best version of ourselves." In order to show us how to become what He intended us to be, He gave us his Son, and tells us to listen to Him. He is telling us that if we make the conscious decision to follow Jesus Christ, we will learn from Him the best way to live. If we

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follow the example of Jesus we will find ourselves living lives full of self-giving love. If we follow His example, we will become that best version of ourselves.

It is important to remember that this learning to follow Jesus Christ, becoming His disciple, is very much a process. Yes, it is true that some people have profound conversion experiences, where their lives go through an abrupt change, and they turn to the Lord, but still they go through a process. This process, this path of discipleship, for most of us, is very much - a one small step at a time - kind of journey. It is a journey that begins when we decide to take up Our Father's command, and listen to Jesus. When we begin to listen to Jesus, we become just a little bit different from everybody else. When we begin to listen to Jesus, we become just a little bit better person. When we begin to listen to Jesus, we become just a little bit more like him.

- When we listen to him, we learn that material wealth is not quite so important, and we become a little less envious of those things our neighbors possess.
- When we listen to him, we learn that we need to be people of integrity, people that do what they say, and say what they do.
- When we listen to him, we learn to be just a little less lustful, and we begin to see other people for who they are, and not for what they can do for us.
- When we listen to him, we learn be just a little more kind. We learn to see the dignity of the people around us, and our desire to cause them harm, or see them hurt, is diminished.
- When we listen to him, we learn it is good to respect, honor, and care for our parents and our elders. We learn to recognize all the sacrifices they have made and the help they have been to us.
- When we listen to him, our desire to be near to him increases, and coming to Mass and receiving the Sacraments become much more of a joy, and much less of an obligation.
- When we listen to him, we learn how holy he is, and how holy we should treat his name.
- When we listen to him, we learn that our fulfillment comes from loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and we learn how to express that love in the way we treat our neighbor.

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I wanted to give you some concrete reasons to listen to Jesus Christ, so I just went through the 10 Commandments. I went through them backwards just to see if you were still paying attention! What I want you to know is that the Scriptures are full of ways Jesus Christ can guide you in your daily life.

The Church gives us this Gospel reading, the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent for the same reason Jesus took Peter, James, and John up to that mountain top. Jesus knew their faith in him would undergo a severe test, when he would go to the Cross, and so he gave them this mountaintop experience, this vision, this consolation, to strengthen them during their time of trial. We are given this vision of Jesus Christ glorified to strengthen our faith in him, and to remind us that he is the One of the Promise, that he is the Lord, that he is the One we need to be listening to, as we struggle through the day-to-day wilderness of our own Lenten journey.

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From the USCCB Daily Reading web site.

**Second Sunday of Lent**  
**Lectionary: 25**  
**Reading 1GN 12:1-4A**

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The LORD said to Abram:  
"Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk  
and from your father's house to a land that I will show you.

"I will make of you a great nation,  
and I will bless you;  
I will make your name great,  
so that you will be a blessing.  
I will bless those who bless you  
and curse those who curse you.  
All the communities of the earth  
shall find blessing in you."

Abram went as the LORD directed him.

**Responsorial Psalm PS 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22**

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R/ (22) **Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.**

Upright is the word of the LORD,  
and all his works are trustworthy.  
He loves justice and right;  
of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.

R/ **Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.**

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him,  
upon those who hope for his kindness,  
To deliver them from death  
and preserve them in spite of famine.

R/ **Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.**

Our soul waits for the LORD,  
who is our help and our shield.  
May your kindness, O LORD, be upon us  
who have put our hope in you.

R/ **Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.**

**Reading 2 2 TIM 1:8B-10**

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Beloved:

Bear your share of hardship for the gospel  
with the strength that comes from God.

He saved us and called us to a holy life,  
not according to our works  
but according to his own design  
and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began,  
but now made manifest  
through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus,  
who destroyed death and brought life and immortality  
to light through the gospel.

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**Gospel MT 17:1-9**

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Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother,  
and led them up a high mountain by themselves.  
And he was transfigured before them;  
his face shone like the sun  
and his clothes became white as light.  
And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them,  
conversing with him.  
Then Peter said to Jesus in reply,  
“Lord, it is good that we are here.  
If you wish, I will make three tents here,  
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”  
While he was still speaking, behold,  
a bright cloud cast a shadow over them,  
then from the cloud came a voice that said,  
“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased;  
listen to him.”  
When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate  
and were very much afraid.  
But Jesus came and touched them, saying,  
“Rise, and do not be afraid.”  
And when the disciples raised their eyes,  
they saw no one else but Jesus alone.

As they were coming down from the mountain,  
Jesus charged them,  
“Do not tell the vision to anyone  
until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

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