

## Matthew 17:1-9, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent, Year A

February 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Today the Church celebrates the Second Sunday of Lent and I hope that everyone is staying on track with all their Lenten observances, but if not, today is a great day to pick yourself up and re-dedicate yourself to your intended devotions of praying, fasting, and almsgiving. Last week we heard the stories of the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Both stories give us a glimpse into the Devil's playbook for drawing us into sin and away from God. He uses the same three temptations in both stories. Unfortunately, he uses these same three temptations on each of us, mostly because they are so successful. This doesn't mean we can't learn from our falls and become more aware of how our enemy works to trap us.

The three temptations are the "lust of the flesh", the "lust of the eyes", and the "pride of life". They are all on display in Genesis 3:6 which says, *"So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food (lust of the flesh), and that it was a delight to the eyes (lust of the eyes), and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise (pride of life), she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate."*<sup>1</sup> Jesus on the other hand, after praying and fasting for forty days in the wilderness is tempted to turn stones into bread (lust of the flesh); to become the ruler of all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, without having to go to the Cross (lust of the eyes); and to prove to all of Jerusalem that He is the Son of God by jumping off the Temple parapet and not being hurt (pride of life). Jesus resists the temptations that Adam and Eve gave into, He is the "New Adam" who remains obedient to the Father.

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<sup>1</sup> Catholic Biblical Association (Great Britain). (1994). [\*The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic edition\*](#) (Ge 3:4-6). New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA.

This week's readings take us in a different direction. Instead of focusing on the temptations that are going to come against us in our efforts to grow in holiness, the readings for the Second Week of Lent are meant to strengthen and encourage us in those efforts. They direct and focus our attention on Jesus, on who He is and why that is so important. Our First Reading today is taken from the Book of Genesis, Chapter 12 and it is the famous story of the "Call of Abram". Some scholars consider this story to be one of the most important in all of the Old Testament, because within it is contained in embryonic form God's plan of salvation for all the world. Abram's name will soon be changed to Abraham but that doesn't happen until Chapter 17. Abraham is the great patriarch of the Israelite people. He is known especially for his great faith in God and that faith is first put to the test in our reading today when we hear that at the age of 75 he is being called to leave the land of his father and his kindred and to go to a land God will show him. In these next few verses God will make three promises to Abraham that will begin the unfolding of His plan to redeem fallen humanity.

The first promise God made to Abraham is that He will make of him a "great nation". At this point in his life this promise must have seemed like a joke to Abraham since he is 75-years old and he and his wife Sarah don't have any children. But despite the unlikely probabilities, God is faithful and keeps His promise. Abraham and Sarah do eventually have a son, Isaac and through Isaac's son Jacob, the twelve tribes of Israel, after 400 years of slavery in Egypt, will eventually emerge as a great nation and take possession of the "Promised Land."

The second promise God made to Abraham is that He will make his name great. Scripture scholar Dr. John Bergsma teaches that, "*In ancient times, the term 'great name' was connected to kings. Ancient kings were the ones thought to have great names. Furthermore, kings were known as 'fathers' of their countries. Emperors, who ruled over not just one but many*

*nationalities and ethnic groups, were 'fathers of many nations.' ”<sup>2</sup> We see this promise fulfilled, or at least partially fulfilled, in the lives of Israel’s great kings, David and Solomon, who ruled during Israel’s golden age, but whose line seemingly died out in the Sixth Century BC when the Kingdom of Judah was conquered by the Babylonians and her people were taken into exile.*

The third promise God made to Abraham is that by him all the families of the earth shall be blessed. At the time of the First Century, this third promise is the one that seems to remain unfulfilled. The Jews were waiting to see what this promise meant, and how God was going to keep it. This brings us to our Gospel story for today which begins with the rather cryptic line, “And after six days Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart.” I say it is cryptic because Matthew doesn’t seem to be writing in any precise kind of chronological order, but this verse begs us to make a connection with what has happened previously in his Gospel and that previous event takes place at Caesarea Phillipi where Jesus asks His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” They reply with, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Then Jesus turns the question on them saying, “But who do you say that I am?” This is the great question of the Gospel. The entirety of the Scriptures compels an answer to this question. This is not a question to be left to history; it is very much a question every person who hears the Gospel needs to answer for themselves, because, in truth, we answer that question by the way we live our lives. Sometimes we have to ask ourselves this question on a daily basis. In fact, if you do nothing else this Lenten Season but answer this question for yourself, in the depths of your heart, it will be a Lent well spent. This question is extremely important and relevant for each one of us today.

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<sup>2</sup> Bergsma, John. Bible Basics for Catholics: A New Picture of Salvation History (p. 51). Ave Maria Press. Kindle Edition.

There are many today who would answer this question saying, “Yes, Jesus was a great prophet and said some great things, but I don’t know about this God thing.” Others will admit, “Yes, Jesus was a great moral teacher, but Him being the Son of God, well that is just something the Catholic Church made up in the Middle Ages.” You get a lot of that.

Now, if you have heard the Gospel message, and its beauty, truth, and goodness has resonated in your heart and you have the desire to experience the power of Jesus working in your life, then your answer will be the same as Peter’s, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” And that answer changes everything. That answer means that God is not some distant force, but now a real and tangible part of your life. It means that He loves you, so much, that He was willing to become one of us and even go to the Cross for us. It means we are created out of His love and in His image and because of that every human being has an inherent dignity and beauty. It means we are meant to live lives of abundance, full of meaning and purpose and love. It means what we do with our lives matters. It means that everything Jesus said and did is of the utmost importance, because in Him it is God reaching out to help and save His people. It means God’s last promise to Abraham of universal blessing is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and we too, can enter into that blessing. That Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God means so much more, that in order to express what this might mean for you personally, I would like to “steal”, is probably the best word, from a prayer called the “Litany of Trust”. This is a prayer that I was told that I need to pray every day, and I will try. It was written by Sr. Faustina Maria Pia, SV, one of the Sister of Life. Paraphrasing from the Litany of Trust: Jesus, You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and that means You are continually holding me, sustaining me, loving me. It means that Your love goes deeper than my sins and failings and transforms me. It means that not knowing what tomorrow brings is an invitation to lean on You. It means that you are with me in my suffering. It means that my suffering, united to Your own, will bear fruit in this

life and the next. It means You will not leave me orphan, that you are present in Your Church. It means Your plan is better than anything else. It means that You always hear me and in Your goodness always respond to me. It means that You will give me the grace to accept forgiveness and to forgive others. It means that You will give me all the strength I need for what is asked. It means my life is a gift. It means You will teach me to trust in You. It means that you are my Lord and my God; and that I am your beloved one.<sup>3</sup>

As we continue through our Gospel, there is so much going on, so much more to talk about, but what I am trying and hoping to do today is to show that the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus is the confirmation of Peter's great confession of faith, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. In our Gospel story we see Jesus transfigured in His divinity. His face shown like the sun and His garments became white as light. The great and holy prophets and priests of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah, are there to testify to Jesus' glory. The soon to be great and holy priests and prophets of the New Testament Peter, James, and John are there to witness as well. As Jesus is transfigured we see the Trinity revealed, the bright glory cloud of the Holy Spirit appears, and the voice of the Father is heard, confirming Peter's great confession, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased, listen to Him." The Transfiguration of Jesus was a "mountain top" experience given to Peter, James, and John to encourage and strengthen them through the difficult times they would be facing as Jesus embarked on His Way of the Cross. The Church gives us this Gospel reading to strengthen and encourage us as we make our own way through this Lenten Season of penance and purification. May the mountain top experience of the Transfiguration help each of us come to know who Jesus Christ truly is and the amazing blessing He is for us and for all the families of the earth.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://sistersoflife.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Mobile-Litany-of-Trust.pdf>, Sr. Faustina Maria Pia, SV, Sisters of Life, Suffern, NY