

Homily for Feb. 28., 2021

This year, during these first weeks of Lent, our First Readings walk us quickly through salvation history. In particular, these readings remind us of the covenants God made through Noah, Abraham and Moses. These all, of course, are the context and the preparation for God's final Covenant with us through Jesus Christ, by His Cross and Resurrection.

Last week, God made a covenant to humanity and all of creation to not allow a flood to devastate the entire earth again. This is remembered by the beauty of the rainbow which is sometimes witnessed during or after rains. The Flood gave a fresh start to the world and all who were saved within the Ark. In Christ, we have all been born again to a new life with a restored friendship with God, each other, and the creation which we are to take care of.

Next week, we review the Covenant God made on Mount Sinai through Moses. Particularly, the reading is the giving of the Ten Commandments. These commandments can be summed up as the command to love God with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. In the Gospel, God the Son will cleanse the Temple with words and actions that point out that the activities (and the hearts of those engaged in the activities) around the temple are fulfilling neither love of God or neighbor.

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This week we remember The Lord's covenant with Abraham and his descendants. It is a covenant with a particular people, but is meant to bring about blessing of all people. The particular passage recalls the mountaintop event where Abraham loved God above even the son God had given in fulfillment of His promise.

And in turn, God did not let His gift of Abraham's son Isaac be harmed. This event has through the ages been seen by us Christians as rich ground upon which to meditate. For instance, Isaac has been understood as a foreshadowing of Christ. Some examples are: Isaac is the only beloved son of his father; Isaac is to be a sacrifice; and Isaac has faith in his father's love and in God's plan. Further, verses not included in our reading today tell us that: Isaac carries the wood of the sacrifice up the mountain; and Abraham prophesies that God would provide the sheep for the sacrifice.

Our gospel today takes place also on a mountain, where one of those who appeared in the Transfiguration of Our Lord is Moses, through whom God gave the Law, which is understood to be the first five books of the bible. One of those books is Genesis, from which we hear both of Noah and of Abraham. And we also know that this mountain-top event, in our Gospel According to Mark, is also the mid-point in the Gospel. From here on, the journey is not just down this mountain, but is a journey to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the city built on Mount Zion. Mount Sion is the place where the Lamb provided by God will carry the wood of the Altar (which is the wood of His Cross) upon which He will be the one eternal sacrifice for us.

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Every year I wonder why the Church places the Transfiguration here in the liturgical year. This moment of clarity and triumph seems more appropriate in Easter, or perhaps anywhere else but here. Since it is in Lent, why not on the Fourth Sunday, Gaudete Sunday, when the clergy wear rose-colored garments and we are one-half way through Lent?

Of course, that is totally subjective with the individual journeying through Lent. For some of us, yes – the season is still fresh and we are still rushing excitedly through this time of renewal. But there are indeed others of us who are already feeling disenchanted that we have failed in our promises, or are beginning to tire, and see that only twelve days have passed out of more than forty.

So we find ourselves here with a refresher. And we thank God for it, AND we are grateful that we still get Gaudete Sunday to refresh us more in a couple weeks.

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The Transfiguration is such an important event in the life and ministry of Christ (and the Church), that it is described also in Matthew and Luke. The Transfiguration is so important, that we have a special feast day for it on August 6th. This event would be on par with the Feeding of the Five Thousand (which is told in all four gospels) and which Matthew and Mark tell us was repeated later with four thousand people. It is also so significant that finally in our time, just two decades ago, Pope Saint John Paul the Second offered us a fourth set of mysteries for the Rosary. And in these Mysteries of Light, one of them is the

Transfiguration. The Transfiguration is offered, then, as a mystery to be pondered on par with Christ's Baptism and the Eucharist. Something is revealed to us. Some part of God's light is shed upon us.

Or at least upon Peter, James and John. What a wonder they experienced! For whatever reasons they were privileged to see this, our privilege is to know of it, ponder it, and desire to grow as close to Christ as they were.

I offer this quote by Jean Corbon on the Transfiguration.

"First, the [Transfiguration]...was not a change in Jesus. The Gospel text and the unanimous interpretation of the Fathers are clear: Christ "was transfigured, not by acquiring what he was not but by manifesting to his disciples what he in fact was; he opened their eyes and gave these blind men sight."...The change is on the side of the disciples. The second certainty confirms this point: the purpose of the transfiguration, like everything else in the economy that is revealed in the Bible, is the salvation of man. As in the burning bush, so here the Word "allows" the light of his divinity "to be seen" in his body, in order to communicate not knowledge but life and salvation; he reveals himself by giving himself, and he gives himself in order to transform us into himself."

The question for us to ponder is how this revelation is for our salvation. How does this revelation draw us closer to Him?

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Part of the answer to that is that we get to know Him better through the Transfiguration.

A little bit about the word "transfiguration." The word comes from Latin and means "a change in form or appearance." And that word was translated for the word from Greek "metamorphosis." Again, this word means to "go beyond, or change, shape."

Perhaps we can use the image of a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. I find it interesting that the word "metamorphosis" has been chosen to be the word used for the process in which a caterpillar changes into a butterfly. This being takes on a totally different shape and structure.

That might be a good image to think of. Though the physical description in the gospel today suggests something amazing happened, what the human eye was able to glimpse and the human mind was able to understand was only the briefest suggestion of God the Son's almighty presence and person. The creator of all who came to save us revealed for a moment a bit of himself. And Moses and Elijah stood as representatives that God has a purpose and a plan that was unfolding in His past covenants and the new covenant God is to make through the Cross and Resurrection.

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In our lives and in our Lent this year – our mountaintop experiences may not exactly coincide with this weekend. But The Transfiguration of Our Lord reminds us to recall the places we have experienced God's consolation, friendship, and transforming power. At those times, the command to follow Him by carrying our own cross is seen to be possible. God has comforted us all, protected us, guided us, strengthened us, and let us catch a glimpse of His love, wisdom, and power. These are meant to help us during the times of struggle.

And such times can help us pray for and be present to others who are struggling and cannot remember who Christ is and how He has the world in His hands. And how He has the world in His salvation which was planned from the beginning and prepared through salvation history.