

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

Second Sunday of Lent

First reading:

(Genesis 12.1-4a)

The Call of Abraham

Each year on this Sunday we have a reading about Abraham, for with him the history of salvation begins: God prepares a people, the family of Abraham, which will eventually issue in his Messiah, Jesus.

Here we have the first beginning. God calls Abram to leave his country, his family, his comfort zone, to go out into an unknown land and an unknown future. Abram has no security beyond the simple promise of God that God will bless him and his family, with a blessing so great that all nations will recognize it and use the very name of 'Abram' as a blessing.

In a fierce and arid land, which offers no protection to strangers, he has no family, no children to support him. He is to become a wanderer over the earth, not knowing the goal of his wanderings. He does not ask for the credentials of this voice that calls him. He does not seem even to have any concept of God, and yet he follows this call.

Just so, the first disciples at the Lakeside will, without a word or a question, follow God's Son when he calls them. Abram's trust in this voice is the model for all personal trust.

Question:

What for me are the real implications of unconditional trust in God?

Second reading:

(2 Timothy 1.8-10)

The Response to God's Love

This reading is put before us by the Church as an encouragement to persevere in our Lenten resolutions.

In his earlier writings, Paul had often seen his own sufferings and those of other Christians as completing those of Christ. Not that there was anything faulty about the sufferings of Christ, but the members of Christ's Body, the Church, must share in the destiny of the suffering Christ. Now the recipients of the letter are called upon to share the sufferings of Paul in prison, not to earn salvation but as a response to the grace of salvation.

The word 'grace' has been much misunderstood, as if 'grace' were an independent gift, a thing in itself. In fact, the word is used in the New Testament to express the love of God or of Christ, particularly the burning human love of Christ. Primarily it is a loving divine or human relationship. When Mary is addressed as 'engraced' or 'full of grace', it means that she is the special recipient of God's love, which, in turn, makes her more lovable. So here the 'grace granted to us in Christ Jesus' is the loving way in which God has regarded us from the beginning of time, although its fullness has become visible only at the Appearing of Christ Jesus.

Question:

How can I best respond to the grace of salvation?

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Gospel:

(Matthew 17.1-9)

The Transfiguration

Each year on this second Sunday of Lent we read the account of the Transfiguration. It was the moment at which the disciples were shown the divinity of Jesus on the Holy Mountain.

The scene is reminiscent of Moses' encounter with God on Sinai, when his face, too, shone like the sun. Moses and Elijah are present because they are the two Old Testament figures who experienced the presence of God on the Holy Mountain.

With his usual impetuous generosity, Peter attempts to 'freeze' the moment. The public declaration of Jesus as God's Son at the Baptism is repeated, but with the addition that Jesus is the authorized divine teacher; Matthew is alert to the implications for the Church of the presence of Christ as Teacher. The cloud is also a symbol of God's presence, to which the human response can only be to fall to the ground in fear and reverence.

The awesome moment of revelation cannot, however, last, and Jesus brings his disciples back to the dire realities before them with the reminder that his death must precede the revelation of his glory at the Resurrection. Until they have experienced the limitless generosity of his death, and the vindication by God of this love, they are not ready to spread the message of Jesus.

Question:

Why are the disciples forbidden to spread the message till after the Resurrection?
