

Reflection on the Sunday Readings

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Transformations

My father used to say, “I was an expert on women, until I married one.” He was saying that he went through a transformative experience because of the presence of another. We have experiences like this as well, experiences that enable us to perceive more definitively, to feel more sincerely, and to recognize more clearly the presence of the One who loves us—the presence of God. Experiences like these, not as rare as we might think, are like doors opening onto the holy. We need only pay attention and realize that no matter where we are, we are in the company of the holy.

FIRST READING: Genesis 15:5–12, 17–18 RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 27:1, 7–8, 8–9, 13–14
SECOND READING: Philippians 3:17 — 4:1 [3:20 — 4:1] GOSPEL: Luke 9:28b–36

Comment

In the verses from Genesis just prior to those of today’s first reading, Abram is just about at the end of his rope. He wonders aloud whether he and Sarai will ever have children of their own. God answers, taking Abram out to view the beauty of the night sky. There, bathed in the starlight, God makes a remarkable covenant with Abram. Unlike customary Semitic covenants in which the weak are obligated to the powerful, here the all-powerful God is willingly obligated to the powerless Abram. God makes it very clear that Abram does not have to do anything to earn God’s generosity (in the form of descendants and land). All Abram has to do is to have faith, to trust that God will act on his behalf. God promises. Abram trusts. The covenant is fulfilled.

Although the reading from Philippians is not directly linked either to the Genesis passage or the Gospel, it disposes us to both. The reading reminds us that we are beneficiaries of God’s amazing grace. We are not citizens of an earthly kingdom but of a heavenly one. Baptism opens the gate to that citizenship; a well-lived life paves the road to it. Finally, a share in Christ’s glorified body will be a benefit to all heaven’s citizens.

In today’s Gospel, we find Jesus at prayer on a mountain. With him are the inner group of his apostles, all of whom are asleep—a foreshadowing of things to come on another mount. Suddenly, Jesus is wrapped in glory. With him stand others not unfamiliar with mountaintop visits from God: Moses, who communed with the Lord amid fire and storm, and Elijah who was attentive to the gentle wind-whisper of the divine voice. Moses the great leader and lawgiver and Elijah the great prophet stand upon the mountaintop, flanking Jesus, and all three are bathed in glory. They are speaking of Jesus’ coming “passage” or *pasch*—his passing over through suffering and death to new life—and how everything the Law and the prophets said of the messiah might be fulfilled.

The sleeping disciples observe none of this, but when they awake and see the three together, Peter is awed and overjoyed and asks to erect three booths. Just then, all heaven breaks loose. The voice of God comes forth from the cloud, as it did when the Israelites left Egypt, as it did on Sinai’s peak, and as it did at Jesus’ baptism. The voice identifies Jesus as the Suffering Servant of God described by Isaiah (42:1). Its message is a revelation, a fulfillment, and a command: “This is my chosen Son; listen to him.”

The scene painted by today’s Gospel is an awesome one. A number of powerful images from the Scriptures, both Hebrew and Christian—God (God’s presence in the cloud—*Shekinah*), Jesus, Moses, Elijah—come together at the Transfiguration. It’s as if all God has done and will do for us is set before us in one majestic moment. On the mountain, we discover who Jesus is, what he must do, and the fullness of the glory that will be his once he accomplishes his mission.

Reflection

The message of the Transfiguration, shown to the privileged three (Peter, James, and John), is meant for us all. It is meant for our world today, a world tormented and hungering for a savior. Transfiguration happens at a high price—the suffering and death of the Chosen One. Those of us who seek to listen to him and to follow him must be willing to suffer for others that they, too, might find hope, come to trust in the God who fulfills promises, and so experience transformation.

We do this by acting as witnesses to the Transfiguration for others. Recall Paul’s comment in today’s second reading: “Observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us.” Paul is stating a very simple but very crucial Christian truth: Everyone needs models of genuine Christian living. And that’s what “witnesses” do. Even our smallest gestures are noticed by others and suggest to them what is important in our lives.

Reflection on the Weekday Readings

MONDAY, MARCH 1

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Tell it like it is

The biggest saints were often some of the biggest sinners. The difference between them and us may be that they sought liberation through confessing their wrongdoing. Holding onto sin means letting it hold onto us, or as Saint Alphonsus Liguori said, "After we have offended God, the devil labors to keep the mouth closed." The sixth-century monk John Climacus was even more picturesque about it: "Eggs warmed in dung hatch out. Unconfessed evil thoughts hatch evil actions." Don't let the spirit of jealousy, resentment, or dishonesty hatch out! Run, don't walk, to the sacrament that liberates!

TODAY'S READINGS: *Daniel 9:4b-10; Luke 6:36-38*

"Ah, Lord, great and awesome God . . . we have sinned and done wrong."

TUESDAY, MARCH 2

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Understanding God

Although the Pledge of Allegiance has been around since 1892, the words "under God" were not officially added by Congress until 1954. While some have criticized the move as breaching the church-state divide, the notion that we are all under a Supreme Being in fact encourages the egalitarian spirit the United States is known for. The idea that no one is above God reinforces the American belief that no one is above the law either. The sense that we are a people living under God can help us see each other as brothers and sisters and motivate us to work for greater equality and justice for all.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 1:10, 16-20; Matthew 23:1-12*

"You have one teacher, and you are all students."

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3

FEAST OF KATHARINE DREXEL, VIRGIN

The best of both worlds

Katherine Drexel (1858-1955) went beyond herself in many ways. Beyond her economic class—she gave away millions of dollars of her inheritance to charities. Beyond her race—she founded a religious order of women to help African Americans and Native Americans. When she was 77, however, her life of service changed to one of quiet and prayer after she suffered a heart attack. Katherine's story shows the importance of both prayer and service, contemplation and action. Find that balance in your own life.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jeremiah 18:18-20; Matthew 20:17-28*

"Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant."

THURSDAY, MARCH 4

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Be a good steward of yourself

In the season of Lent, tradition calls on Christians to fast. Fasting has a long history, going all the way back to biblical times. Jesus fasted in the wilderness before embarking on his ministry. As a spiritual discipline fasting points to a period of preparation—in Lent, preparation to celebrate the Easter mysteries. It reminds you to clear away distractions and look more closely at yourself and where things come from and where they go. Think of all the "resources" in your life: time, money, food, possessions, even love. Are you using them well? Now's the time to find out.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 16:19-31*

"I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all . . . according to the fruit of their doings."

FRIDAY, MARCH 5

LENTEN WEEKDAY

No regrets?

You may be tempted to believe you have "failed" Lent; you might have relaxed your resolutions or Lenten practices. But you should not think that your Lent is over the instant you stumble. The third- and fourth-century church father Saint John Chrysostom reminds us that our task is rather simple: "Have you sinned? Mourn and annul the sin. How toilsome is this? . . . I am not telling you to cleave the oceans, or to navigate slowly into port from the high seas, or to march, or to depart on an endless journey . . . Then what? Mourn the sin." Always be willing to reevaluate your goals for this Lent, keeping in mind that repentance is all that is asked of you.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a; Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46*

"Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?'"

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Readings for next Sunday's Liturgy: March 7: Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15; Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8, 11; 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12; Luke 13:1-9.