

2nd Sunday in Lent – Cycle A

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Genesis 12:1-4a

With the appearance of Abram (later to be renamed Abraham), the story of Genesis takes on a completely new form. From the viewpoint of salvation history a new period begins, marked by a divine intervention destined to reshape history's course. An obscure Semite is called by God, and, through his response in faith, there begins the unfolding of God's plan which will reach its climax in the events of the Exodus and Mount Sinai. The mounting aversion to God that characterized the first eleven chapters now gives way to a conversation with God. Today, we hear the call of Abram.

12:1 The LORD said to Abram:

Note that the initiative is God's not Abram's. "Abram" means "father who is exalted" yet he is 75 years old and childless.

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

There are two requirements placed on Abram: The first requirement is complete disassociation from the pagan past. The second requirement is migration to a land of God's choice.

² "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. ³ I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you."

God makes a threefold promise of blessing:

- 1) "great nation", a promise which upgraded to a covenant in Genesis 15 and fulfilled in Moses
- 2) "name great", a promise which is upgraded to a covenant in Genesis 17:1-19 and fulfilled in David
- 3) "all the communities of the earth", a worldwide blessing which us upgraded to a covenant in Genesis 22 and fulfilled in Jesus the Christ.

This threefold blessing shows God's favorable regard for Abram and enhances Abram's individual and family life. People will use him as a standard of blessing (see Galatians 3:8).

⁴ Abram went as the LORD directed him.

There is no hesitation; Abram's obedience is immediate even though he is 75 years old and well settled in the community.

2nd Reading - 2 Timothy 1:8b-10

After writing the epistle to Titus, Saint Paul went to Rome (although not necessarily immediately afterward). There, both he and Saint Peter were seized and thrown into prison. This was around the year 66-67. This letter is his last, as he was martyred in 67 and thus this letter can be regarded as his spiritual testimony.

Timothy was the pastor of the Church of Ephesus. The two letters which Paul wrote to him contain a series of rules and recommendations for the good government of the young community, whose members were mostly of a Gentile background.

Beloved: ⁸ Bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God. ⁹ He saved us and called us to a holy life,

For Paul himself salvation is normally a future event [work out your salvation in fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12)]. Paul recognizes what God has already graciously achieved for humanity in the cross and resurrection of Christ Jesus (the past). He also recognizes that through God's grace He is working in us now (the present), and he also recognizes that the end result is something of the future as we must one day appear before the tribunal of Christ so that each one may receive good or evil for what one has done in the body (2 Corinthians 5:10).

not according to our works

We cannot "earn our way" to heaven, but good works, done for the love of God, are necessary.

but according to his own design

God the Father knew that He must have His Son offered as the perfect sacrifice in order for heaven to be opened, we didn't think of it, but cooperated in His plan.

"Observe... how Marcion, and Manes, and Valentinus, and others who introduced their heresies and pernicious doctrines into the Church of God, measuring divine things by human reasonings, became ashamed of the divine economy. Yet it was not a subject for shame but rather for glorying: I speak of the cross of Christ. ... For in themselves death and imprisonment and chains are matters of shame and reproach. But when the cause is added before us and the mystery viewed aright, they will appear full of dignity and a matter for boasting. For it was that death on the cross that saved the world when it was perishing.

That death connected earth with heaven; that death destroyed the power of the devil and made men angels and sons of God; that death raised our nature to the kingly throne. Those chains enabled the conversion of many.” [Saint John Chrysostom (A.D. 393-397), *Homilies on the Second Epistle to Timothy*, 2]

and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began,

Before the world was, God was; and He knew then what would be required.

¹⁰ 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.

No longer are people denied the sight of God when their physical life ends. Now, the spiritual life begins and we can see God face-to-face at the heavenly banquet. Redemption from sin and the call to holiness of life are not won by personal deeds but are freely and graciously given according to God’s eternal plan (see [Ephesians 1:4](#)).

Gospel - Matthew 17:1-9

Last week we heard of Jesus’ temptation in the desert at the beginning of His public ministry. Today we hear of His transfiguration which occurred about two years later, after the feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000. The account of the transfiguration confirms that Jesus is the Son of God and points to fulfillment of the prediction that He will come in His Father’s glory at the end of the age (Matthew 16:27). This event marks the beginning of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem for His passion.

¹ After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother,

Peter, James and John are the inner circle of the apostles. They were also chosen to be separate from the rest of the twelve in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37) and at the raising of Jarius’ daughter (Mark 5:37).

and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

A mountain symbolic of revelation, a kind of Galilean Sinai; God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:12-18) and Elijah at the same place (1 Kings 19:8-18). No localization is necessary although Carmel, Tabor, and Hermon have been suggested.

² And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light.

The brightness of the illumination recalls the brightness of the face of Moses after the Sinai revelation (Exodus 34:29-35), which made it necessary for Moses to veil his face.

³ And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him.

Moses and Elijah represent respectively the Law and the Prophets. The term “the Law and the Prophets” was used to designate the entire collection of Old Testament books, and thus the fullness of the revelation of God to Israel. Jesus joins the two as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (see [Matthew 5:17](#)). Elijah was assumed bodily into heaven (2 Kings 2:11) and Hebrew legend has it that Moses was also assumed. This may explain how both can appear here in bodily form. Neither Matthew nor Mark tell us what was discussed, but Luke 9:31 says “*They spoke about his departure (exodus), which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.*”

4 Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, “Lord,

Matthew uses the word “Lord”, while Mark uses “rabbi” as the form of address. “Lord” literally means “my great one”, an address of respect to God, angels, and earthly sovereigns.

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.”

Peter is a master of understatement. No doubt he is making a reference to the feast of tabernacles, one of three yearly feasts for which all males of Israel were required to travel to the Temple and lived in tents (or booths). The feast occurred in September-October and lasted for eight days. The three Apostles want to stick around for a while. The feast of tabernacles commemorated the sojourn of the Israelites on Mount Sinai while they received the revelation of the Law through Moses. This is not the revelation of another law, a greater reality is manifested here. Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets.

it ⁵ While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them,

This is the *shechinah* (glory cloud), the divine presence, the cloud that occupied the tabernacle in the time of Moses.

then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”

These words are a revelation of the sonship of Jesus; Matthew repeats the words spoken at the baptism (Matthew 3:17) and adds “listen to him” (sort of like Mary’s “do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5). Jesus is the Son and the revealer. The Israelites are commanded to listen to a prophet like Moses whom God will raise up for them in [Deuteronomy 18:15](#).

6 When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid.

This is their reaction to the divine command (listen to him) rather than to the vision itself.

7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and do not be afraid.”

Jesus’ touch overcomes their fear and perhaps consecrates them to further service. Luke’s

account of the transfiguration suggests the disciples were asleep and this is a dream-vision.

⁸ And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone.

Moses and Elijah have withdrawn; diminished in significance before the fuller revelation in Jesus.

⁹ 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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