

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Second Sunday of Lent —Year C

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Second Sunday of Lent - C

Reading I

Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18

The Lord God took Abram outside and said,
“Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can.
Just so,” he added, “shall your descendants be.”
Abram put his faith in the LORD,
who credited it to him as an act of righteousness.

He then said to him,
“I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans
to give you this land as a possession.”
“O Lord GOD,” he asked,
“how am I to know that I shall possess it?”
He answered him,
“Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat,
a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”
Abram brought him all these, split them in two,
and placed each half opposite the other;
but the birds he did not cut up.
Birds of prey swooped down on the carcasses,
but Abram stayed with them.
As the sun was about to set, a trance fell upon Abram,
and a deep, terrifying darkness enveloped him.

When the sun had set and it was dark,
there appeared a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch,
which passed between those pieces.
It was on that occasion that the LORD made a covenant with Abram,
saying: “To your descendants I give this land,
from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River, the Euphrates.”

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 27:1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14.

R. (1a) The Lord is my light and my salvation.

The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom should I fear?

The LORD is my life's refuge;
of whom should I be afraid?

R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Hear, O LORD, the sound of my call;
have pity on me, and answer me.
Of you my heart speaks; you my glance seeks.
R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Your presence, O LORD, I seek.
Hide not your face from me;
do not in anger repel your servant.
You are my helper: cast me not off.
R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

I believe that I shall see the bounty of the LORD
in the land of the living.
Wait for the LORD with courage;
be stouthearted and wait for the LORD.
R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Reading II

Philippians 3:17—4:1

Join with others in being imitators of me, brothers and sisters,
and observe those who thus conduct themselves
according to the model you have in us.
For many, as I have often told you
and now tell you even in tears,
conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ.
Their end is destruction.
Their God is their stomach;
their glory is in their “shame.”
Their minds are occupied with earthly things.
But our citizenship is in heaven,
and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.
He will change our lowly body
to conform with his glorified body
by the power that enables him also
to bring all things into subjection to himself.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters,
whom I love and long for, my joy and crown,
in this way stand firm in the Lord.

Verse Before the Gospel

Matthew 17:5

From the shining cloud the Father's voice is heard:
This is my beloved Son, hear him.

Gospel

Luke 9:28b-36

Jesus took Peter, John, and James
and went up the mountain to pray.
While he was praying his face changed in appearance
and his clothing became dazzling white.
And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah,
who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus
that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.
Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep,
but becoming fully awake,
they saw his glory and the two men standing with him.
As they were about to part from him, Peter said to Jesus,
"Master, it is good that we are here;
let us make three tents,
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."
But he did not know what he was saying.
While he was still speaking,
a cloud came and cast a shadow over them,
and they became frightened when they entered the cloud.
Then from the cloud came a voice that said,
"This is my chosen Son; listen to him."
After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.
They fell silent and did not at that time
tell anyone what they had seen.

Exegesis

Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18

Genesis Chapter 15 is titled, *The Covenant with Abram*. As it begins, the word of God came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not Abram! I am your shield; I will make your reward very great.” Abram bemoans the fact that he and Sarah have no children to be his heir. In response, God promises Abram that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. Abram in turn replies to God with his pledge of faith: “Abram put his faith in the Lord, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness.” (Gn 15: 6). God then pledges to give Abram and his descendants the land as a possession, i.e., the Promised Land.

A covenantal relationship is now formed between God and Abram and his descendants, us. It is a promise of the abundant life here on earth symbolized by the promise of descendants as numerous as the stars, and a promise of eternal life symbolized by the gift of the Promised Land, i.e. Heaven. It is a promise for those who chose to enter this relationship with God by a response of faith, living in right relationship with God. Abraham will become known as *Our Father in Faith*. His faith, endurance and perseverance serve as an example for all.

The promise land, however, only comes after a period of servitude, symbolized by the years of slavery in Egypt. This period of servitude is a symbol of our slavery to sin here on earth. The Exodus to follow would then become a paradigm for salvation, our journey through the desert of this life to the Promised Land.

The ritual to seal the covenant involves the shedding of blood, the blood of animals. The participants must acknowledge that the violation of the covenant will bring upon themselves the same result as the animals sacrificed and cut in half. The Prophet Jeremiah makes this clear: “The men who violated my covenant and did not observe the terms of the agreement which they made before me, I will make like the calf they cut in two, between whose two parts they passed.” (Jer 34:18). Life requires that we remain connected to God, the source of life. To be separated means sure death, eternal death.

Psalm 27:1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14.

Psalm 27 consists of fourteen verses and is titled *Trust in God*.

It begins: *The Lord is my light and my salvation*. The Hebrew word that we translate as *light* is *or*: In the Creation Story, the first thing that God spoke into being was *or*; light. Light permeates Sacred Scripture from beginning to end. The *Book of Revelation* ends with the image that there will be no more need of sun or moon, as God will be our light. St. John proclaims: “God is light.” (1Jn 1: 5). Jesus Himself states clearly, “I AM the light of the world.” The Hebrew word translated as *salvation* is *yesa*. The word *Yeshua* (Joshua or Jesus) is derived from *yesa*.

I believe that I shall see the bounty of the Lord in the land of the living. King Hezekiah, after he had been extremely ill and recovered begins a beautiful prayer of gratitude by acknowledging his mortality: “I said, ‘I shall see the Lord no more in the land of the living.’” (Is 38: 11). Later rejoicing in his recovery Hezekiah proclaims: “The living, the living give you thanks, as I do today. Fathers declare to your sons, O God, your faithfulness. The Lord is our Savior; we shall sing to stringed instruments in the house of the Lord all the days of our life.” (Is 38: 19-20). Like Hezekiah rejoicing in the healing of his physical illness the psalmist is rejoicing in God’s delivery from his enemies, all evil doers.

Exegesis (Continued)

Philippians 3:17—4:1

Philippi was a flourishing town in the Roman province of Macedonia. It is situated on a busy road, the Via Egnatia, linking the Adriatic and Aegean Seas. The city lacked a Jewish synagogue. There was a very small Jewish community there so Paul's community was predominantly Gentile. The community was established by Paul during his second missionary journey. It was the first community established in Europe. (See Acts 19:9-40).

Our pericope today falls within a broader passage where St. Paul is addressing a polemic and discord in the community. Some leaders in the community were becoming very legalistic which was causing undo stress among this fledgling church made up predominantly of gentiles. The tension was being brought about by overzealous legalistic teachers. They were placing a heavy emphasis on the need for strict adherence to all Jewish laws including circumcision. St. Paul uses himself as a negative example of a devout legalistic Jew who once violently persecuted the Church.

In our passage St. Paul continues by stressing the importance of living in the Spirit and detaching from things of the flesh, e.g. circumcision and legalistic dietary laws. Paul is encouraging the community to move beyond things of the world, earthly things, and to concentrate on things of heaven. In this effort he is reminding them that their true citizenship is ultimately in heaven. To be preoccupied with things of this world lead only to destruction and death.

The focus thus turns from things of the earthly body to our hope for a glorified body. This obviously links us to our Gospel and the Transfiguration, where Jesus is revealed in His glorified body. St. Paul always seeks to put on the heart and mind of Christ, and to rejoice in the glory of Christ. Paul is inviting the community to emulate him in this effort. He ends by encouraging them to "stand firm in the Lord."

Luke 9:28b-36

It is always essential to understand the setting of each Gospel scene to capture full meaning. Jesus is about to turn His focus toward Jerusalem and His Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension, i.e. the fulfillment of His mission as Savior. He is also preparing His disciples for their mission as His Mystical Body, His Church. At the beginning of Chapter 9, "He summoned the twelve and gave them power and authority... and sent them to proclaim the Kingdom of God." (Lk 9: 1).

When they returned crowds gathered around them, they were hungry, and Jesus told the twelve, "Give them some food yourselves." (Lk 9: 13). Jesus then multiplied their meager gifts of five loaves and two fish and gave them to the disciples to distribute to the crowd of five thousand men. This is followed by Peter's confession about Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus then explains what it means that He is the Messiah and clearly teaches them about His Passion, Death and Resurrection. Finally, He explains to them the conditions of discipleship.

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 9:28b-36

“About eight days after he said this, He took Peter, John, and James and went up the mountain to pray.” (Lk 9: 28). Why is the time frame of eight days mentioned? It was on the seventh day that God appeared to Moses. “The glory of God settled upon Mount Sinai. The cloud covered it for six days, and on the seventh day He called Moses from the midst of the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of the Lord was seen as a consuming fire on the mountain-top. But Moses passed into the midst of the cloud as he went up on the mountain, and there he stayed for forty days and forty nights.” (Ex 24: 15-18). Perhaps the eighth day (the next day) represents the fulfilment of the gift of the Law in Jesus.

Elijah also experienced a theophany on the mountain. “He (Elijah) walked for forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb... Then the Lord God said, ‘Go outside and stand on the mountain before the Lord; the Lord will be passing by.’” (1Kgs 19: 8, 11). The Transfiguration also portrays Jesus as the fulfilment of the Prophetic Tradition. Luke reveals Jesus as a Prophet in the miracle of the raising of the widow’s son: “The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, exclaiming, ‘A great prophet has arisen in our midst, and God has visited His people.’” (Lk 7: 15-16).

Moses and Elijah both anoint their successors with the Spirit as Jesus will do in the Upper Room on Easter Sunday evening and in a broader sense at Pentecost. Moses anoints Joshua before his death: “Now Joshua, son of Nun, was filled with the Spirit of Wisdom, since Moses had laid hands upon him.” (Deut 34:9). Elijah anointed Elisha: “Then you shall anoint Elisha as prophet to succeed you.” (1 Kgs 19:16).

So much has been written about the presence of Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration signifying that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, and rightfully so. What about the fact that Moses and Elijah had been dead for hundreds of years? Now they are standing on the mountain conversing with Jesus about His Exodus. Jesus is standing before Peter, John and James with light radiating from within Him such that His clothes became dazingly white beyond anything this world could create. He is standing before them in His glorified body. The voice of the Father can be heard: “This is My chosen Son, listen to Him.” Unlike the voice of God at Jesus’ baptism where God is speaking directly to Jesus, i.e., “You are my beloved Son,” God is now speaking to the apostles and to us. God is giving us a glimpse into eternity! He is giving Jesus, the three apostles, and us, a vision of life beyond the Cross, life beyond death.

Peter, John, and James want to hold on to the moment signified by their offer to build three tents. They are wrong in thinking that they can prolong and preserve the theophany. They are also wrong in making Jesus an equal with Moses and Elijah, e.g. three equal tents. Luke reveals to us in *Acts* through Stephen that “The Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands.” (Acts 7: 48). Stephen then quotes the Prophet Isaiah: “Thus says the Lord: The heavens are my throne; the earth is my footstool. What kind of house can you build for me; what is to be my resting place?” (Is 66: 1).

They must come down from the mountain. Jesus then begins His journey to Jerusalem. He has one more mountain to climb, the Mount of Calvary; but now we have all seen clearly what lies beyond!

Reflection

Referring to the current state of our society someone once said, “We are like a people on a journey who have forgotten where we are going.” As I look at our society, I see that very clearly. We tend to be listless, and we easily follow the latest trend. Perhaps it is part of the human condition. Dante wrote centuries ago that life is like waking up in the middle of a forest and not knowing which direction to go or like coming to a fork in the road and not knowing which path to take.

This weekend’s Gospel is Luke’s rendition of the Transfiguration of Jesus. If you look at the setting in the Gospel, Jesus has just told His disciples for the first time that He was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die and be raised after three days. The disciples were in a state of shock and full of fear and anxiety. Then Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain and He is transfigured before them. Moses and Elijah are there with Him. The risen Lord is there in His transfigured glorified body. Moses and Elijah are alive and recognizable as well. The voice of God is heard, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.” Jesus and His closest disciples get a glimpse of eternity, of the great beyond. The ultimate destination becomes visible. They see where they are headed.

Peter wants to hold on to the moment. He wants to build three tents for them to stay in the experience. Jesus has other plans. He leads them down the mountain. Even though Easter is before them, Good Friday is in His path. He must come down the mountain. There can be no resurrection without the Cross. It is for this hour that He came. Jesus needs to accomplish the task at hand, but now the ultimate destination is in sight.

Coming down the mountain the disciples question what rising from the dead meant. Two paragraphs before the account of the transfiguration has a heading that in all bibles reads, “The First Prediction of the Passion.” The first sentence is as follows: “He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed and rise after three days.” Why is the heading of the paragraph not, “The First Prediction of the Resurrection.”

Often in the Gospels we hear that Jesus’ face is set like flint on Jerusalem, or that He is resolutely journeying to Jerusalem. I always interpreted or understood that as His focus to be on the Cross. Maybe His focus was beyond the Cross and the Cross was just in His path. Perhaps His vision was on the ultimate goal, union with the Father and with us! At the Last Supper He prayed, “Father may they be one as you and I are one.”

Perhaps that should be our focus as well. We are all on a journey and we should keep our ultimate destination in sight. If we do, we have a much better chance of getting there safely. We are all companions on the same journey and we all should have the same destination as our goal. We need to all help each other along the way. Jesus is walking with us, this I know. I also know that this parish community is a great group to travel with! May God bless us on the way.

In Jesus and Mother Mary,



Personal Witness

During my prior life as a Certified Public Accountant I did a fair amount of work-related travel. Several of my clients owned their own private aircraft. Several had licenses to fly but they were not professional pilots by any means, and so I was always a little apprehensive to fly with them. One of those pilots in particular gave me cause to worry.

One day we were flying back to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan from a business meeting in Detroit. There were four stout men cramped into a twin engine four seat Cessna. For some reason I drew the copilot's seat. Being an amateur that he was, the pilot apparently did not check the weather. After being in the air for about 30 minutes he said, "It looks like there is some weather ahead." I could see it on the radar screen and shortly thereafter I could see total darkness ahead and it was early afternoon. We flew into a hailstorm.

Now sitting in the copilot's seat with my knees against the dashboard and my face about 18 inches from the windshield I had a pretty good view of what was coming. Suddenly it was total darkness. The hail hitting the windshield was deafening. It sounded like a machine gun. I felt that the windshield could collapse at any moment. I looked over at the pilot and he was turning white. I discovered that I could pray three complete rosaries in five minutes flat. I think that the worst part of the experience was knowing that we were traveling at 180 miles per hour without being able to see where we were going.

After about 10 or 15 minutes that felt like an eternity, we either flew out of or above the storm. We burst out into a clear blue sky. After total darkness the light was blinding. I looked back at the darkness and never wanted to go through that again. I immediately felt that my prayers were answered, and I thanked God for delivering us from that nightmare.

Whenever I ponder the Transfiguration, I think of that experience. Jesus had just told His disciples that He was journeying to Jerusalem to be crucified. It had to be a dark moment for them. The climb up the mountain must have been particularly long and arduous. But then from the cloud came the voice of God. Jesus was transfigured before them. Moses and Elijah, dead for hundreds of years, appear with Him. It is a glimpse into eternity. It is a vision of life beyond the storms of this world. It is life beyond the Cross as the Glorified Risen Lord stands before them.

There was still work to be done and they had to journey with Jesus down the mountain and then up the Hill of Calvary. This experience had to give Jesus and His disciples the courage to go on. Unlike the baptism of Jesus where the voice of the Father is addressing Jesus, God is now speaking to the disciples and to us, "This is my beloved Son, listen to Him." God wants us to know what lies ahead for us as well, if we but remain faithful, and that should give all of us the courage to go on. The inevitable storms of life remain in our path, but the bright light of Easter dawns for us who believe.

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