



2nd Sunday of Lent



Date: Sunday, March 8, 2020 | **Season:** Lent | **Year:** A

First Reading: Genesis 12:1–4a

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 33:4–5, 18–20, 22 | **Response:** Psalm 33:22

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 1:8b–10

Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 17:5

Gospel Reading: Matthew 17:1–9

Preached at: the Carmelite Monastery of Sr Thérèse in Benoni in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Today our readings are short, and they are basically inviting us to listen to God, and to notice that God has not abandoned us, but is always with us. We are simply called to respond to God's presence and call in our lives.

I'm not sure if you remember the Gospel from last week. It was where Satan tempted Jesus on top of a mountain. This happened in the scriptures just after Jesus was baptized and the voice from heaven said: this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased... Jesus rejects Satan on top of the mountain along with his empty promises of commanding Angels, Earthly Power and material satisfaction... but did you notice how God sent his Angels to take care of Jesus anyway. God is always desiring to care for us.

This week's Gospel we're yet again asked to contemplate a mountain scene, but this time Jesus has called his friends together and they witness his transfiguration, which is a fancy word for saying that they got a glimpse of his glory. This was not for Jesus' benefit, but for his friends, Peter, James and John, so that they might have a deeper appreciation of Jesus' identity and mission.

We know that on mountains God reveals something of himself.

This morning we heard how Jesus talks with Moses and Elijah on the mountain. Moses represents God's Law, Elijah the Prophets of God who bravely spoke of the need for conversion towards God. Both represent people who desired to see God clearly, even face-to-face.

Even in the temptation scene, God sent his angels. Always on mountain tops people find God or something from God. Moses received the law from God on the top of Mount Sinai, whilst Elijah found God in the whisper of a gentle breeze. Somehow something of God is revealed in those peak moments of our lives. But they are often fleeting. They are meant to sustain us on a journey. That is why Jesus called his friends together, so that they might better understand who Jesus was. Because just as Jesus was tempted to forget who he was, Jesus wants his friends to remember. He needs them to understand as he embarks on his journey to Jerusalem and the Cross.

You would think this glorious transfiguration would be enough for them to understand. But there's a funny line in the middle of the Gospel where Peter interrupts Moses and Elijah's conversation, and he awkwardly says "Lord,"... You can see he gets it half-right. He confesses that Jesus is Lord... but then he says: "it is wonderful for us to be here ... let me make some tents..." and we have this sudden interjection by the Trinity, no less, (who are present in Jesus the Son, and the Cloud of presence which we know when God is present among us it is God the Holy Spirit), but it is the voice of God the Father who repeats the words we heard at Jesus' Baptism "This is my Son, the Beloved". This time, however, perhaps for the benefit of them, and us, but I think especially for Peter who clearly wasn't totally understanding what was going on, he was told: "Listen to Him!"

That I think, is the simple invitation we are given today. To Listen to God, not just to what God is saying to us, but to where he is drawing us, to the Call of God that I believe he is making to each one of us. It's a call to Godself...

Our other readings talk about calling. In the 1st reading we have the call of Abram. We see how God is the one who initiates the dialogue with Abram. We hear how he is called to leave everything, his country and family, but in return God promises to bless him, to make his descendants into a great nation with land, and to make his name great. What is important here, I think, is not so much Abram's response (which is trusting), but God's promise and his faithfulness to the covenant that he will make later with Abram, who becomes Abraham, our Father in faith.

God promises to bless Abram, and not just him as an individual, but his descendants, his family and their descendants, who would eventually become an entire nation – God's blessing is overflowing. And he makes a covenant which he is

faithful to. As we heard in the Psalm: “The word of the Lord is faithful” The reading ends with us being told that Abram ‘went as the Lord told him’. In other words he Listened and had faith.

In our 2nd reading St Paul invites us to rely not on ourselves, but on the power of God who has “called us to be holy – not because of anything we ourselves have done but for his own purpose and by his own grace”. This grace was given to us before the beginning of time, but was revealed in Jesus.

Here again, there is another call. We are all called to be holy. And we’re told God’s grace comes to us not because we did anything to deserve it – but because it was given before the beginning of time. That’s the sheer wonder of God – that he loved us, that he blessed us, first! And he calls us to holiness with him.

What is holiness? It is to be in tune with God’s desires for me. And those desires, I believe, are our best desires for ourselves, because they, like us, originate from God. Holy people are those who are listening to God.

Henri Nouwen wrote in his book, *The Life of the Beloved*, “Every time you listen with great attentiveness to the voice that calls you the Beloved, you will discover within yourself a desire to hear that voice longer and more deeply.”

In our opening prayer this morning we prayed that we might be nourished inwardly by God’s Word, so that with our spiritual sight made pure, we might rejoice to behold God’s glory.

This is the promise or blessing that I think God is holding out for us this morning. If we listen to Jesus, who is the Son of God, the Word, our sight will behold God’s glory. Just like Peter, James and John got a glimpse of that glory, just as Moses and Elijah beheld God’s presence, we too can see God if we are prepared to notice him. If we listen to God’s word, if we answer God’s call, we will be gifted with the grace to see things as they really are.

Jesus revealed himself to his friends because he knew he would need their support. There’s several trio’s mention in the Gospel: Peter, James and John; Jesus, Moses and Elijah; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit; but there’s another trio, on another hill, Jesus on the Cross between two thieves.

We begin Lent knowing that the journey is towards the Cross, but not just death but resurrection and new life. Abram could have died – he was 75 when he received this call. But God decides to bless him, and make him a blessing to others, and so he calls him, and in return Abram is blessed, comes to know God, and his life – even his name – is changed forever. It's the same with us...we are preparing for Easter because the Incarnation and Resurrection have changed everything – and each of us is called, and therefore matters in God's great plan of salvation. And this is the Good News.

For God does not call us to be cursed, but to bless us, abundantly and with love and generosity and forgiveness. He blesses us with the grace by giving us the sacraments which allow us to tap back into that stream of grace that is always flowing from God to us. In God we can find the strength to be holy. In God we can find ourselves again.

Let us pray in thanksgiving for all of God's blessings to us.

Let us pray in thanksgiving for all for whom we are a blessing.

Let us pray in thanksgiving for being called by God, and loved by God, and blessed by God, even before we realise it.

Today is also International Women's Day – and I could not come to this wonderful convent without praying for you all – so let us pray for the blessing Women are in our lives, in our Church, and in the world. Let us give thanks for all the many examples of Women who have listened to God and shown us ways of knowing God more deeply.

Amen.

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