

March 17, 2019

Second Sunday of Lent

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.

Background:

Luke places his account of the Transfiguration after Jesus' first prediction of his future rejection by the elders, scribes and chief priests. (Luke 9:22) After this prediction, Jesus tells the disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me..." (Luke 9:23) Luke states that it was about eight days after Jesus had given this teaching that he took Peter, John, and James up the mountain where the transfiguration took place.

The actual transfiguration takes place while the disciples are "overcome by sleep." The event as described by Luke has two distinct parts. The first is a description of the transfiguration of Jesus. The text states that Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain to pray. Neither Matthew (Matthew 17:1-8) nor Mark (Mark 9:2-8) mention that Jesus is going up the mountain to pray. Luke relates this to his community as an experience of Jesus in prayer. It is Jesus who is changed, interiorly and exteriorly. The text states that his face was changed, and his clothing became dazzling white. But this prayer experience does not include Peter, James and John. Verse 32 states that they were overcome by sleep.

The second part of the description includes the disciples, but it no longer refers to them as Peter, James, and John. Now it is Peter and his companions, reflecting Peter's role in the rest of the event. He recognizes the unique blessing of the experience and suggests that they build tents so that Jesus, Moses, and Elijah can stay, and the experience can continue. Lest Peter misunderstand what is taking place, they are embraced by the dark cloud of God's presence, and God states clearly that Jesus is God's Son. Then when the cloud lifts, Jesus is standing there alone. Jesus is not a prophet like Moses and Elijah, but he only is God's Son.

Reflection Questions:

1. So far, this lent has been...
2. If a friend asked me to accompany them for a day of climbing, I would likely respond...
3. When I am praying, I have noticed...
4. What do you think was going through the minds of the disciples during the eight days after Jesus' prediction of his own rejection and death, and telling them that they, too, must be willing to take up their cross if they are going to be his follower?
5. The gospel text describes a dark cloud appearing and coming over the disciples. That experience of the disciples reminded me...
6. If I were to put myself in the shoes of Peter, James, or John coming down the mountain that day, I...
7. Why do you think the Church has chosen to give us this gospel text for our reflection as we begin the second week of Lent?
8. Can you take some time to talk with God honestly about your experience of God's presence in your own journey or this lent, or some other thought that arises within you from this gospel?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

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Excerpts from the readings for March 17, 2019 the Second Sunday of Lent

The Lord God said to Abram, "Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. So 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. 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."

*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? Hear, O Lord, the sound of my call; have pity on me, and answer me.
Of you my heart speaks; you my glance seeks. 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.
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.*

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.

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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.

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Excerpts from Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18; Psalm 27:1, 7-9, 13-14; Philippians 3:17—4:1; and Luke 9:28-36