

Second Sunday of Lent (Genesis 12: 1-4a; 2 Timothy 1:8b-10; Matthew 17:1-9)

One week into Lent is a tough place to be. We have five weeks left until Easter. It seems as though we ought to be further along than just beginning the second week. Like this winter, it seems to go on forever.

The readings follow the thought that 'faith is a journey.' It's not just a noun...the sum total of the things that we believe." Faith is much more than that....it's a verb. Faith is the way that we live reflecting our beliefs.

The first reading begins: "The Lord said to Abram." These same words: "the Lord said," are repeated hundreds of times in the Old Testament. God always takes the initiative in speaking to us. Our task is to listen, to trust and to do what God asks of us. Like Abram, we are all by nature called to be listeners, trusters and doers of God's Word.

The first thing God asks of Abram is to leave his home country and move to another one which God would show him. Leaving home is one of the most important and most difficult experiences of life. Moving to a new place, and bereavement, are said to be the two most stressful things we experience.

I can attest to that as I remember my move from home 46 years ago from Newark, NJ to Dayton, Oh. I had never been away from home in my entire 21 years of life. But, like most young people, if I didn't leave, I would not mature. I came to a place where I knew only two friends – my best friend from college (who was in the Air Force) and his wife...it was a scary time. This was a foreign land to me – the mid-West, where there were the plains and the buffalo....

My transformation began when I was able to find a Catholic Church on Base on a Sunday morning where I found the beginnings of a new community of friends and supporters. That made me feel like I was home again!

The Transfiguration is so familiar to all of us that it has lost its original bang. We have to take off our wraparound sunglasses; peel the scales of overexposure from our eyes in order to take a fresh look.

Jesus was finishing an eight month tour of one night stands in the provincial towns of Galilee. He was eating nothing but junk food at greasy spoons. He considered Himself lucky when He got it. Sweltering in the 100 plus degree heat and freezing at night under the stars...He was not sleeping. He was staying one step ahead of the cops. His audiences were receiving Him coldly.

Shortly before this account opens, Jesus had told the twelve of His approaching death. They went into a downer. They had thought the glory days were coming. They had visions of twenty years service and retirement as apostles on pension, disciple 'senior' discounts, working on their golf swing, etc. And now this...who needed this?

Then Jesus took them on a three day forced march southward from northern Palestine. He had to wear a no-nonsense face. He might have feared a mutiny or suspected they would slip away after dark. **That they did not reveals the love that already bound the apostles to Him.**

Exhausted, they wound up at Mount Tabor near Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. The mountain runs up about 1800 feet - almost a straight ascent. Imagine the physical condition of Jesus – he was no wimp." He loved mountain tops. They brought Him closer to His Father.

Jesus selected Peter, James, and John to join Him, and the other nine left at the base camp, were happy they had not been drafted. They were looking for a shady tree, a cool breeze, and a stream to do laundry and chill red wine. They might have needed the three drafted ones with the message, "Tell us about it tomorrow, guys."

Their clothes sticking to their skin, these four finally got to the top late in the day. They were running on empty. The apostles had one thought: sleep. Jesus chose to pray. As Peter climbed into his sleeping bag, he might have mumbled, "Everyone has his own idea of a good time." In the early morning hours, the mountain top exploded as though hit by a nuclear weapon. The apostles were basket cases. Their employer (Jesus) "was transfigured before their eyes." He had removed His disguise. This was no carpenter. This was God. This was His Big Bang.

The apostles were witnessing Moses and Elijah passing on the torch to their Leader. God was saying to Jesus' followers, "You have been brought up to listen to Moses, Elijah, and their peers. But now it is my Son...listen to. Him I appoint as your new Commander in Chief."

Next day Peter, James, and John came down that mountain jumping from rock to rock with the agility of boys. They were on a high. Their Jesus had proved to be a big winner. Their arduous climb in the sauna heat had paid off.

For us, part of the joy of the journey is that there are always new people joining us on our walk. We know who we are. We know the happiness we have when we live the life of the Lord, even though our journey of faith sometimes brings us hardships.

For us here in the present, the time comes all too soon when we begin to doubt whether building monuments or achieving status is really the purpose of life. As we get older, we're invited to the mountaintop for a transfiguration experience which will (hopefully) enable us to discover that brain-power and money-power are not nearly as important as love-power. Suddenly it becomes clear that being kind and gentle in an often violent world is the ultimate wisdom for us humans. And we discover that age is not an obstacle to being a loving, caring presence.

Faith demands that we separate ourselves from our own selfish desires in order to give to others. Faith is not just something we profess. Faith is a life that we lead. It is a life of joy, a life of sacrifice, and a life that leads us to God.

So, we move into the second week of Lent. And, if we're off to a good start, then good for us. Like the Apostles, Jesus has much to tell **us** at the mountain top. If we have yet to begin the climb, we can play catch-up. Jesus will toss us a rope and pull us.

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(With excerpts from Fr. Joe Pellegrino and Fr. James Gilhooley)