

Second Sunday of Lent

Year A



FIRST READING
Genesis 12:1-4

PSALM
Psalm 33:4-5, 18-20, 22

SECOND READING
2 Timothy 1:8-10

GOSPEL
Matthew 17:1-9

PRAYER

Psalm 33:4-5, 18-20, 22

The word of Yahweh
is straightforward,
all he does springs
from his constancy.
He loves uprightness
and justice;
the faithful love of Yahweh
fills the earth.

But see how Yahweh
watches over those who fear him,
those who rely
on his faithful love,
to rescue them from death
and keep them alive in famine.

We are waiting for Yahweh;
he is our help and our shield,
Yahweh, let your faithful love
rest on us,
as our hope has rested in you.

READING THE WORD

First Reading
Genesis 12:1-4

Yahweh said to Abram, 'Leave
your country, your kindred and
your father's house for a coun-

try which I shall show you; and
I shall make you a great nation,
I shall bless you and make your
name famous; you are to be a
blessing!

I shall bless those who bless you,
and shall curse those who curse
you, and all clans on earth will
bless themselves by you.'

So Abram went as Yahweh told
him, and Lot went with him.
Abram was seventy-five years
old when he left Haran.

Second Reading
2 Timothy 1:8-10

So you are never to be ashamed
of witnessing to our Lord, or
ashamed of me for being his
prisoner; but share in my hard-
ships for the sake of the gospel,
relying on the power of God
who has saved us and called us
to be holy -- not because of any-
thing we ourselves had done
but for his own purpose and by
his own grace. This grace had
already been granted to us, in
Christ Jesus, before the begin-
ning of time, but it has been
revealed only by the appearing
of our Saviour Christ Jesus. He
has abolished death, and he has
brought to light immortality and
life through the gospel.

Gospel
Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with
him Peter and James and his
brother John and led them up
a high mountain by themselves.
There in their presence he was
transfigured: his face shone like
the sun and his clothes became
as dazzling as light.

And suddenly Moses and Eli-
jah appeared to them; they were
talking with him.

Then Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Lord,'
he said, 'it is wonderful for us to
be here; if you want me to, I will
make three shelters here, one for
you, one for Moses and one for
Elijah.'

He was still speaking when sud-
denly a bright cloud covered
them with shadow, and sudden-
ly from the cloud there came a
voice which said, 'This is my
Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my
favour. Listen to him.' When
they heard this, the disciples fell
on their faces, overcome with
fear.

But Jesus came up and touched
them, saying, 'Stand up, do not
be afraid.'

And when they raised their eyes
they saw no one but Jesus.

As they came down from the

mountain Jesus gave them this order, ‘Tell no one about this vision until the Son of man has risen from the dead.’

HEARING THE WORD

“Going Forth Listening to God’s Word”

The readings of the previous Sunday taught us what the choice for life means. Making the decision to trust and obey God is the first step to grow. But we cannot make that choice unless we persistently listen to His voice. This is the message of the Second Lenten Sunday.

Abram’s life story turns decisively as a result of God’s call, as reported in the first verses of Genesis 12. This call begins the long and all important story of the patriarchs that will eventually overflow into the history of God’s chosen people. What we call “the history of salvation” – God’s plan and actions to save the world and the people – begins with the call of Abram. Yet, the beginning and background of it are presented already in Ch 11, where Abram’s father Terah moves away from the distant land of “Ur of the Chaldeans” taking with him the whole family. Their final destination is the land of Canaan, but for unspecified reasons they make a stop half-way, in Haran. In that foreign city Abram finds himself in a painful, even tragic situation: he has neither the past (having left his homeland and family roots behind), nor the future (his

wife Sarai is childless with no hope for descendants). Stunningly, when no possibilities were forthcoming, God’s voice and command come, spurring Abram to complete the journey he has begun.

God’s emblematic call contained a direct command to “go forth”, accompanied by a stunningly rich promise related to the painful situation of Abram’s life: the promise of numerous descendants and land to live in. These promises referred to a distant future – God does not speak of immediate solutions – and are concentrated in the word “blessing”: “you will be a blessing” and “all the families of the earth will find blessing in you”. Abram is well aware that he might not see all of them effectively fulfilled in his life. But with deep trust in the dependability of God’s word, he moves on. He “went as the Lord directed him”, in spite of the questions and uncertainties, in spite of his advanced age of 75. And it was through his trust and fidelity, shown in listening and obedience to God’s voice that the promises began to take concrete shape. As he moved forward on the journey, the fulfilment of God’s word moved closer.

The Apostle Paul, when writing to his disciple and coworker Timothy, also finds himself in an uneasy situation. He’s well aware that the end of his life and service is approaching. Because of his work and commitment to Jesus and the Gospel he finds himself in jail, expecting to give the

supreme testimony to his Lord by lying down his own life in martyrdom. Such a situation is extremely distressing and very challenging. He might have been asking himself: “Is such an end a sign that my life-mission was a failure?” Nevertheless, the apostle persists in constant prayer and gratefulness to God. He has already experienced the paradoxical truth that God’s “power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). Thus, he also exhorts his disciple to go forth and “not be ashamed” of either the Lord Jesus or of him, the “prisoner for his sake”. Timothy is to bear his “share of hardship for the Gospel with the strength that comes from God”.

Timothy would be able to follow his master’s example only through deep acquaintance with the Gospel of Jesus Christ who triumphed over death. The Apostle reminds him about this, exhorting him not to forget his call and the grace which was given him. Later in the letter Paul encourages him to carry on with this testimony, pointing out the importance of listening to the message of the Gospel and transmitting it: “...what you heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will have the ability to teach others as well” (2 Tim 2:2). In spite of difficulties and dangers, Timothy is to continue Paul’s mission sustained by the power of God’s word, and to share that word with others.

In the Gospel we hear about the transfiguration

of Jesus which happened on a mountain during his journey to Jerusalem. For Matthew (and for Mark and Luke) this journey was the only pilgrimage of Jesus to the holy city. Here he would suffer death on Calvary, a small hill just outside the walls of the city. Yet, the final outcome of this journey was the resurrection. As the group of disciples accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem, he taught them about importance of the cross as an integral part of God's salvific plan. This message was so difficult that they were trying hard to ignore it. A vision of glory on the mountain was to counterbalance the tragedy of the scandalous death on Calvary.

At Jesus' transfiguration three chosen apostles witnessed a divine revelation similar to the one on Sinai: the revelation of God to Moses and the whole Israel and later on to Elijah. The bright cloud, God's voice and human prostration all serve as expressions of reverence when a human being witnesses the powerful manifestations of God. The disciples know about these events from Israel's past and they themselves realize that they are in the presence of the living God. Their natural fear is transformed by a touch from Jesus at the end of the story, a touch of reassurance and consolation. His words "rise, and do not be afraid", as well as mention of the resurrection, point forward to the events they

will experience shortly after Jesus' death. A glimpse of the bright glory of the risen Messiah, whom they will first see tortured and humiliated, is to strengthen their faith and hope for the time of crisis. It will prevent them from being overwhelmed and shattered by the scandal of Jesus' suffering.

At the heart of the story of transfiguration lies communication from God delivered by His voice. The words identify Jesus as God's "beloved Son", the Messiah, whom the disciples are to listen to. In this way God prepares them for the future. When difficult events of life and history will conspire to take away their faith and hope, they are to rely on the words from God,

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*The Word of God
should challenge
and transforms us*

the mission of Jesus and their journey of faith for themselves and disciples in all subsequent generations.

This Sunday we observe how God approaches individuals who started on a journey, be it to Canaan or to Jerusalem, of a journey of life. Invariably, they find themselves in various difficulties, sometimes faced with the prospect of death. Abram stops in Haran with no human hope. Timothy faces fear seeing the approaching death of his teacher and mentor, Paul. The disciples are frightened

of the cross and as Jesus approaches Jerusalem. In all these cases God's voice addressed them with a command to go forth on their way. It brings not only a command but reassurance that God continues to go with them. Listening to His voice and call, they open themselves for the unlimited power of His grace that will lead them and will change what appears hopeless. "For the Lord's word is upright; all his works are trustworthy" says the psalmist. With him we make our prayer: Lord, "we put our hope in you".

LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD

The theme of Second Sunday of Lent summons us to reflect on our missionary mandate. Every time we attend the Holy Mass the priest or the deacon at its end says "go forth" and proclaim the Word of God with your lives. The Gospel of today tells us that the three disciples of Jesus after hearing God's voice wanted to pitch tents on the mountain because they experienced God's presence and were happy to stay where they were. Yet, following Jesus, they had to come down from the mountain and continue their mission, just as Abram was commanded to go forth from his place of rest. When we reflect on this command three insights emerge as lessons for our lives.

First, listening to the Word of God changes us and challenges our life and faith. In this season of Lent lis-

tening to the Word of God must be followed by conversion – a visible change that takes place in our lives. God assures us that “a doer who acts, such a one shall be blessed in what he does” (Jas 1:25). The Word of God should challenge and transforms us. Therefore, we must examine our life and determine what needs to be eliminated from it. For instance, if I am good at gossiping, telling lies, stealing, or being too judgemental I should respond to God’s word by turning away from such practices. This would make me a transformed person.

Second, going forth listening to God’s Word, sets us on fire. St Ignatius says “go forth and set the world on fire”. When we listen to God’s Word we are empowered by the life-giving breath of the Holy Spirit and we cannot keep that Word to ourselves; we must share it with our brothers and sisters. Mary, after she received the message from God through the angel Gabriel, went to share that revelation and her personal joy with Elizabeth. We are to share that fire we experience in the encounter with the Word of God through our testimony and witness of life, especially in our families, community, at work, at school and everywhere we find ourselves.

Third, going forth listening to God’s Word compels us to action. Like Abram we are to go forth and become God’s missionaries. We must leave our comfort zones and move forth wher-

ever God sends us, and in the process evangelize his people. This does not mean going to distant, foreign lands. We are to be missionaries first to our own world which is in so much need of God’s presence. This kind of mission involves “going out of the self” in order to meet our brothers and sisters. In this encounter we share our personal joys and sorrows, but above all, we share our faith with others. We must not justify our withdrawal by saying “I am unsociable” or “I am an introvert”; we should be open-hearted persons who can channel God’s blessings to others. In doing this we “come down” from the mountain of our comfort and move on to the “foreign lands” like Abram or the disciples.

We should embark on this mission with courage. It is God who calls us to carry forth this mandate of missionary discipleship. We should not fear anything because God assures us of his continuous protection and blessings. We should not say “I am afraid, not educated, untrained, too young or too old”. God calls everyone, regardless of age or status, to carry out this mission in a particular and unique way. Prayer and meditation on God’s Word are what we need to respond adequately to this call and mission. Thus, our going forth must be done in the attitude of constant listening to God’s Word.

PROVERB

“Those who travel bring with them glad tidings”

ACTION

Self-examination:

Do I allow the fire of the Word of God to modify and inspire me? Do I go forth announcing God’s Word to my family, community and society?

Does my listening to God’s Word urge me to go out of myself to an encounter with others?

Response to God:

I commit myself to listening to the Word of God through reading the Bible and spending at least 10 minutes in prayer every day.

Response to your World:

I commit myself to share something of my faith and experience of God with someone in the course of this week.

As a group, chose one practical way in which we can “go forth” or “come down from the mountain” with the fire of God’s word in us and share this fire in our community context?

PRAYER

Lord God, we thank you for calling us to go forth listening to your Divine Word. Help us to be doers of your Word. In flame us with the breath of the Holy Spirit, so that we may go wherever you are sending us and proclaim your Word. Banish every fear and doubt from us and give us strength to serve you faithfully. We place our hope in you. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.