

# Second Sunday of Lent

## Year C



**FIRST READING**  
Genesis 15:5–12, 17–18

**PSALM**  
Psalm 27:1, 7–9, 13–14

**SECOND READING**  
Philippians 3:17–4:1

**GOSPEL**  
Luke 9:28–36

*Scripture quotations from  
New Revised Standard Version Bible:  
Catholic Edition, © 1989, 1993.  
Used with permission.*

### PRAYER

#### Psalm 27:1, 7–9, 13–14

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

The LORD is the stronghold of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid?

Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,  
be gracious to me and answer me!  
“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!”

Your face, LORD, do I seek.

Do not hide your face from me.

Do not turn your servant away in anger,  
you who have been my help.

Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,  
O God of my salvation!

I believe that I shall see  
the goodness of the LORD  
in the land of the living.

Wait for the LORD;

be strong,

and let your heart take courage;

wait for the LORD!

### READING THE WORD

#### First Reading

##### Genesis 15:5–12, 17–18

God brought Abram outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Then he said to him, “I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the

Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.” But he said, “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?” He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.

#### Second Reading

##### Philippians 3:17–4:1

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.

But our citizenship is in heaven,

and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

#### Gospel

##### Luke 9:28–36

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud.

Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

## HEARING THE WORD

### "Fighting Uncertainty"

The readings of the second Sunday of Lent narrate events and situations where several significant biblical characters experience a state of uncertainty and confusion, and are rescued from it by divine or apostolic intervention.

The first reading builds on Gen 15:1-4 which reports how God appeared to Abram with the promise of making him a great nation. Abram, whose name will be changed to Abraham (Gen 17:5), responded to this promise with a bitter complaint that God gave him no child up to this time, despite an earlier promise (cf. Gen 12:1-5). God responded by showing Abram the multitude of stars and restating the promise of exceedingly numerous descendants. Moving away from doubt, Abram responded with faith which was reckoned to him as righteousness. Biblically, righteousness means being in the right relationship with another person. Thus, this important statement means that the right relationship with God is built on faith and trust.

God then made yet another great promise stating that Abram will be given

the land of Canaan. This promise was even harder to believe. After all, Abram was just a nomad, a traveler with a small family. How could he even hope to have this large, rich, and already inhabited land for himself? Consequently, Abram was plunged into doubt and uncertainty, asking God for a sign saying, "how am I to know that I shall possess it [the land]". God would provide this sign through a covenant. Covenants were formal and binding agreements made through solemn and often complex ceremonies. They cemented relationships and defined the mutual duties and obligation of those making them. The covenant ceremony described here is highly symbolic. In Hebrew, the phrase "to make the covenant" literally means "to cut the covenant". Thus, Abram was instructed to cut the sacrificial animals in halves and arrange the parts opposite one another. Abram then fell into a deep sleep where he saw a vision of God passing as a flame of fire between the animal parts. This was a part of the covenant making ceremony which meant that the one who would violate the covenant by not fulfilling its obligations would be cut into pieces, just like the sacrificed animals (cf. Jer 34:18). Significantly, it was only God who passed between the pieces, Abram did not. This means that God bound himself to Abram unconditionally, assuring him that the promise of the land will certainly be fulfilled. Through this solemn and immensely significant ceremony, God re-

moved any doubt and uncertainty from the father of the future Israelite nation.

One of Paul's chief reasons for writing to the Church in Philippi was to fight against false teachers who were confusing and misleading his converts there. These teachers were certain Christians who insisted that the continuing practice of the Jewish laws and customs was a necessary condition for being righteous before God, and, therefore, necessary for salvation. Such teaching was likely to create chaos and confusion among the Philippians who had just become Christians and were unsure what this new religion required.

Paul was absolutely furious with those teachers. He called them "dogs" and "evil workers" who "mutilate the flesh" (Phil 3:2). He described them in the harshest way. Stating that "their God is the belly", Paul referred to their preoccupation with food laws and dietary restrictions required by the Jewish Law. Writing about "their glory being their shame", he referred to the circumcision demanded by the Jews but considered shameful by the non-Jews in the Greco-Roman world. Finally, Paul stated that "their minds are set on earthly things", meaning that they focus on the life and practices relevant for this world only.

Reacting to these teachers, Paul wrote to the Philippians with clarifications and explanations, stating clearly that the demand for con-

tinuing practice of the Jewish law was contrary to the Gospel. The core of Christian faith is the belief that righteousness comes from faith in Jesus alone, and that salvation was made possible by Jesus' death on the cross. To insist that the observance of the Law is necessary amounts to claiming that Jesus' death was insufficient for salvation. This made those teachers "enemies of the cross of Christ". Paul insists that his converts imitate himself who, once a zealous practitioner of the Law, renounced it when he became a believer. The teaching of these opponents was harmful because it diverted the Philippians from the focus on Jesus alone by imposing additional, unnecessary and useless requirements on them. Instead of focusing on earthly things demanded by the Law, the Philippians must focus on the pursuit of eternal life, where they belong as the "citizens of heaven". Writing this with great clarity and conviction, the apostle aimed to remove the Philippians' uncertainty and confusion regarding the true Christian faith and practice sowed by the false teachers, and to set them on a straight path towards their true home.

The Transfiguration account, among other important elements, describes the reactions of Jesus' three closest disciples. The appearance of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus' changed appearance, utterly confused them, as revealed by Peter's offer to build the three tents. First, Peter's suggestion to make a tent for each

of the three implies that he placed Jesus on an equal footing with Moses and Elijah. Second, seeing Jesus in the glorified body, he called him "master" which implies a significant but ordinary man. Finally, building tents means that Peter thinks of this mountain as a permanent residence for Jesus.

Peter and his companions were confused and unclear about the meaning of what they witnessed. Above all, they were unable to understand who Jesus is. God resolved their confusion by making a powerful and public statement. First, God declared Jesus his Son, someone infinitely greater than Moses and Elijah. Then, God declared Jesus his "chosen one", meaning that Jesus was the Messiah, chosen and sent by God into the world for a special mission. Finally, God commanded the disciples to listen to Jesus. This declaration, made in the presence of two spokesmen for God - Moses and Elijah - meant that Jesus now takes on the role of a new mediator of God's will to the people. God's words and command removed the disciples' uncertainties and cleared their confusion regarding the meaning of the Transfiguration and the identity of Jesus.

Today's readings confirm that confusion and uncertainty befall God's servants at times. Abram, even though he had a deep faith and trust in God, was not free from uncertainty and doubt. The Philippian Christians were unsure about how to practice their new faith and were easily deceived

by false teachers. Peter, James and John struggled to understand Jesus, even though they had stayed with him for a long time. In each of these situations, confusion and uncertainty were removed. Abram was given a sign of the covenant, Paul wrote to the Philippians with clarifications, and the disciples heard God's voice with a clear declaration of Jesus' identity. These examples show that God does not abandon his servants to doubt and confusion. The Psalmist knew the feeling of uncertainty, but also the way out of it when he wrote, "Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!"

## **LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD**

Faith does not quench the flame of reasoning. If it were to do so, we would each die in the cold, for it takes human reason to know when to put on heavy clothing. As long as we live in this body with our minds alert, we will have questions and doubts. Doubts pop up frequently even in the hearts of people with deep faith. However, doubt in faith is meant to lead to a deeper understanding of faith, not to its loss.

Abram was a man of faith but had questions. The Church in Philippi had faith and yet had issues that needed to be resolved. Peter, John and James had faith in Jesus and yet they were terrified on the mount of transfiguration, unable to fully interpret what they beheld there.

A young woman who had invested her whole life serving God in many ways was involved in an accident that led to multiple bone fractures. As I stood by her at the emergency unit of the hospital and she engaged in a fight with uncertainty, she uttered a shrill cry: "Oh God. Why? Why is this happening to me?" However, in the midst of all that uncertainty that sought to cloud her faith, she held on to the Word of God and kept believing. After months of recuperation, she survived and came to give thanks to God for saving her. Her faith triumphed over uncertainty.

Indeed, there are myriads of trials that confront us in our journey of faith. However, these challenges should not be regarded as obstacles. Without them, the journey might be boring and monotonous. Without challenges, there will be no testimonies. When Abram was faced with uncertainty, God spoke. When the Church at Philippi sought clarification on some issues, Paul became God's spokesperson and wrote a letter to them. When Peter, John and James were fascinated but at the same time terrified by the happenings on the mount of transfiguration, a voice from the cloud spoke: "This is my Son, my Chosen one; listen to him!"

The greatest weapon in the fight against uncertainty is submission to the Word of God. It can be likened to a person making a journey on an unknown road using GPS. An unknown voice speaks through the gadget at decision-making moments on

the journey suggesting the direction one ought to take. In the end, submission to that voice leads the person to his/her destination. In relation to God, we can be confident that the Lord has the complete map of our lives in his hands. He knows the beginning and the end of every life.

If certainty can be attained only by sight, the blind would never be certain of anything. Going through a dark tunnel can be frightening but the light of faith in the heart gives hope and certainty.

To seek to live one's faith as if all is well, when in reality all is not well, is to feign pretence itself. In any true encounter with the divine, faith is elicited but it does not substitute for the activity of the human mind. When all is not well in life, and we have difficulty grasping the meaning of the unfolding events of our lives, it is okay to tell God, "Lord, I am lost. I can't get it." This does not mean we have lost faith, but is rather an expression of our desire to have our faith deepened. In the end, when faith blossoms and glows, darkness gives way to light.

## PROVERB

*"If certainty  
can be attained  
only by sight,  
the blind  
would never be  
certain of anything."*

## ACTION

### Self-examination:

To what or to whom do I turn when faced with doubts and challenges?

When was the last time that I profoundly doubted God's care for me? What was the cause?

### Response to God:

I turn to God in the prayer of supplication for the deepening of my faith and trust, particularly in time of trial and doubt.

### Response to your World:

I will think of a person who is struggling with his or her faith and seek to help by encouraging them to read and pray with the Word of God. In our meeting, we will share our individual doubts and uncertainties in our faith life. How can we assist one another in dealing with them?

## PRAYER

*Eternal Father,  
in you I live and move  
and have my being.  
May your overwhelming presence  
in my life  
be a source of clarity  
and strength in my struggles  
with uncertainty and doubt.  
Grant this  
through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*