

SECOND SUNDAY

OF LENT

YEAR A



FIRST READING

Genesis 12:1-4

PSALM

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

SECOND READING

2 Timothy 1:8-10

GOSPEL

Matthew 17:1-9

Prayer

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

For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.

Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and shield. Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

Reading the Word

First Reading: Genesis 12:1-4

The LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you

all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Second Reading:

2 Timothy 1:8-10

Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light 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. And he was

transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

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Hearing the Word

"Trustful Listening"

The message of the second Sunday of Lent emphasizes that the decision to trust and obey God must be intrinsically connected with persistent listening to God's voice, which comes to a willing listener in diverse ways.

Abram's life story took a new turn as a result of him heeding God's call. This call, narrated in the first reading, started the would-be patriarch, on a long and all-important journey. It was a new beginning for him, but also a starting for the story of other patriarchs, and the history of God's chosen people in general. This history, often termed "the history of salvation", refers to God's plan and actions to restore his creation, and save his people from the disastrous consequences of the fall of the first parents, described in the last's Sunday first reading. The roots of Abram's journey lie in the decision of his father Terah, to move away from the distant land of "Ur of the Chaldeans", along with his entire family. Their final destination was the land of Canaan, but they stopped half-way, in Haran, where Terah died. In that foreign city, Abram found himself in a painful, even tragic situation. Having left his homeland and family roots behind, he had no past. Moreover, he seemed to have no future, as his wife Sarai was childless; there was no realistic hope for descendants and continuation of his family line. Stunningly, when no possibilities were forthcoming, God's voice and command come,

spurring Abram to complete the journey towards Canaan.

God's call came as a commanding order to "go forth", accompanied by a stunningly rich promise related to the painful situation of Abram's life and his uncertain future, namely the promise of numerous descendants, and the land to live in. These promises referred to a distant future, as God did not specify the time of their fulfillment, and were concentrated on the word "blessing"; Abram was to be a blessing, and all families of the earth would find blessing in him. This was a truly stunning message to a homeless and childless man. Abram was likely very well aware that he might not see the full scope of these promises fulfilled in his lifetime. But with deep trust in the dependability of God's word he moved on "as the Lord had told him", in spite of the questions and uncertainties, and in spite of his advanced age of seventy-five. In his trust and fidelity, shown in listening and obedience to God's voice, the promises he received began to take concrete shape. As he moved forward on the journey, the fulfillment of God's word moved closer.

Writing to his disciple and co-worker Timothy, the apostle Paul was himself facing an uneasy situation, as he felt the end of his life and service fast approaching. Because of his work and commitment to Jesus and the Gospel, he was languishing in jail, expecting to give the final testimony to his Lord by laying down his own life in martyrdom. Such a wait must have been extre-

mely 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 persisted in constant prayer, and gratefulness to God. He had already experienced the paradoxical truth that God's "power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). Thus, he also exhorted his loyal disciple to go forth and "not be ashamed" of either the Lord Jesus, or of his imprisoned mentor. Timothy was to "join with [Paul] in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of 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 reminded Timothy about this, exhorting him not to forget his call, and the grace which was given him. Later in the letter Paul would encourage Timothy to carry on with this testimony, pointing out the importance of listening to the message of the Gospel and transmitting it (cf. 2 Tim 2:2). In spite of difficulties and dangers, Timothy was to continue Paul's mission, sustained by the power of God's word, and to share that word with others.

The Gospel passage narrates the event of Jesus' transfiguration, which took place on a mountain during his journey to Jerusalem. This was Jesus' journey into death, which he would suffer on yet another hill, Calvary, just outside the walls of the city. A vision of glory on the mount of transfiguration was to counter-

balance the tragedy of the scandalous death on Calvary.

At Jesus' transfiguration, three chosen apostles witnessed a divine revelation similar to the one on Mount Sinai where God appeared to Moses, and later in history, to Elijah. The bright cloud, God's voice and the disciples' prostration, all serve as expressions of reverence when a human being witnesses the powerful manifestations of God. The disciples knew about such events from Israel's past, and they must have realized that they were in the presence of the living God. Their natural fear was transformed by a touch from Jesus at the end of the story, a touch of reassurance and consolation. His words, "get up and do not be afraid", and the subsequent mention of the resurrection looked forward to the events that the disciples were soon to experience in Jerusalem where they would see their Lord crucified. A glimpse of the bright glory of Jesus on the mount of transfiguration was intended for the time when they would see him tortured, humiliated and crucified. The vision of the glorified Jesus was meant to strengthen their faith and hope, for the time when they would see Jesus crucified, and would prevent them from being overwhelmed and shattered by the scandal of Jesus' suffering.

At the heart of the story of the transfiguration lies communication from God to the disciples. God identified Jesus as his "beloved Son" whom the disciples ought to listen to. In this way God prepared

the disciples for the future. When difficult events of life and history would conspire to take away their faith and hope, they were to rely on the words from God, and confidently cling to his Son, to his teaching and his commands. The community of believers which would arise on the basis of the disciples' testimony, would embrace Jesus as the divine guiding voice, fulfilling the role which Moses and Elijah played in the past, for the people of Israel.

This Sunday shows how trustful listening, and acceptance of God's word, enables believers to move ahead, even if the way appears to be barred by insurmountable obstacles. This was the case for the homeless and childless Abram who ventured into the unknown, responding to God's command. Timothy faced despair seeing the approaching death of his teacher and mentor, Paul. Yet, the imprisoned apostle showed his pupil a way forward, exhorting him to suffer for the Gospel, and to listen to its message for strength and guidance. Jesus' disciples were soon to face a profound crisis, at the death of their master. To ready them for this, God spoke to them with a commanding charge, to listen to Jesus, which was intended to bring them the trust and resolve they would soon badly need. Confident listening, and response to God's voice, is necessary for any believer on a journey of faith, to face those inevitable moments of hopelessness and the sense of futility. In such moments, the words of prayer of the Psalmist

became all-important, "let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us".

Listening to the Word of God

The readings of the Second Sunday of Lent, summon us to reflect on our missionary mandate. Every celebration of Holy Mass concludes with a command to "go forth", and one of those formulas adds, "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.

Firstly, listening to the Word of God changes us and challenges our life and faith. In this season of Lent listening 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 transform us. Therefore, we must examine our life and determine what needs to be eliminated from it. This would make us transformed people. Secondly, going forth listening to God's Word, sets us on fire. St Ignatius said, "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. 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.

Thirdly, 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 wherever God sends us, and in the process evangelize his people. This does not necessarily 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.

Finally, 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. 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 and trustful listening to God's Word.

Proverb

“Those
who
travel
bring
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ings.”

Action

Self-examination

Do I allow the fire of the Word of God to modify my life and inspire me? In what ways?

Does my listening to God's Word shape how I encounter and respond to others?

Response to God

I commit myself to listening to the Word of God through reading the Bible and spending at least ten 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, we 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. Inflammate 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 through Christ our Lord. Amen.