

Second Sunday of Lent, Year A  
Gen 12:1-4a  
Ps 33, *passim*  
2Tim 1:8b10  
Mt 17:1-9

Deacon Bob Cassey  
St. Petronille Parish, Glen Ellyn  
March 12, 2017

The last time I was privileged to break open the word of God with you, it was February and the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time. The Gospel that day was taken from the Sermon on the Mount, the part about it being better to pluck out an eye or chop off a hand than to fall into sin. I said at that time that the Church has never taken those words literally; instead, they are examples of “hyperbole” – overstatement and exaggeration. Jesus used these extreme examples to make a point and that point was that he, Jesus, had come not to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them. The phrase “the Law and the Prophets” was how people at that time referred to the entire body of the Hebrew Scriptures, what today we call the Old Testament.

This Sunday takes us much farther along in the Gospel of Matthew, and it gives us a glimpse into what fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets looks like.

For two Sundays in a row, Jesus has stood on a high mountain. Last week we were told how in the last of his three temptations, Satan, the devil, took Jesus up to a high mountain where he could see all the kingdoms of the world spread out at his feet. Today, Jesus took his inner circle – Peter, James, and John – and led them up to the top of a high mountain. And something extraordinary and remarkable happened.

We can divide human life into three domains. There is the realm of sin, the realm of grace, and the realm of glory. To the extent we human beings are right with God, we are in the realm of grace. To the extent we are not right with God, we are in the realm of sin. It is possible that we turn away from God and toward sin so completely that we no longer have the life of God within us; at that point we have wandered away from the realm of grace, and that is very sad. But if we turn toward God’s grace, if we put away the barriers we erect against God’s grace, if, despite our weakness and failures, we let God pick us up and set us in the right direction, if, finally, we take seriously the exhortation Jesus gave us in the Gospel of 3 weeks ago, to “be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect,” then at the end of our days – probably after a time spent in Purgatory, just to smooth down the rough edges – at the end of our days we will enter into the realm of glory.

Occasionally we get a glimpse of glory right here on earth. Sometimes we even call those glimpses mountaintop experiences. Peter, James, and John had a mountaintop experience. For one brief shining moment they saw Jesus in his glory, Jesus transfigured.

Jesus was in conversation with Moses and Elijah, who represented the Law and the Prophets, the whole Hebrew Scriptures. And, as with all mountaintop experiences the chosen apostles had a tough time letting go of it. Peter said, “Ooooh, it’s so good. Let’s stay up here!” That was the moment when God the Father came in a cloud. He spoke to the apostles, put his stamp of approval on Jesus his “beloved Son,” and directed the apostles to listen to him.

Jesus led the apostles down from the mountain. Everything looks great from a mountaintop, and it’s natural to want to stay, but on this side of the grave, anyway, we don’t live on the mountaintop; we live in the valley. On the mountaintop things are bright and clear. In the valley it’s cold and wet and muddy. But that’s the world we live in, the realm of grace. Only by passing through the valley do we reach the realm of glory. Only by passing through Good Friday, with all its pain and sorrow, did Jesus come to the joy of Easter glory.

That’s why Jesus told the apostles not to tell the story of their mountaintop experience until after he would rise from the dead. They couldn’t understand; they hadn’t yet seen the whole movie. But we can’t say the same thing. We have seen the whole movie.

In the first reading, from the Book of Genesis, the Lord God told Abram – this was before God changed Abram’s name to Abraham – God told Abram to leave the comfort and security of his father’s house and to set out. God didn’t even tell him where he was going; he promised to show him along the way. And yes, Abram did just what God told him to do.

God has sent each one of us out too. He wants us to leave our comfort zones, those safe boundaries that eventually draw tighter and tighter until they end up suffocating us. He wants us to leave our comfort zones and journey out, at God’s direction, to tell the story of Jesus’s glory, and of the glory he has promised is in store for us. Abraham had to go forth in order to father a great nation who would be God’s chosen people; the apostles and disciples each had their own mission and their own mission territory. And so do we, each one of us. It’s our family, our neighborhood, the company we work for, our school, our workplace. We have been to the mountaintop. We have seen the promise of God’s glory. And we await the fulfillment of God’s glory in the heavenly kingdom. We know how the story of Jesus ends – not on the cross but on the far side of the cross. And we know how our own story ends – not on the cross but on the far side of the cross.