

Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Sunday Readings

February 21, 2016 Second Sunday of Lent

As we gather together on this almost spring-like day, our hearts are saddened by the news of the tragic shootings that took place in our community last evening, taking the lives of six innocent people, leaving two people in critical condition, and an entire community feeling traumatized. Too frequently in recent years, we hear about senseless acts of violence taking place in other parts of our country; even though it has taken place here, in our own backyard, we remain shocked and left asking the inevitable question: *Why?!* While there are many unanswered questions at this early stage, that question of “*Why?!?*”, the same one that people in all those other parts of the country on other but similar sad occasions asked, may never be answered. I’m not certain, but it seems to me that this may be a first for our community to have to deal with such senseless and random acts of violence on such a large scale; whether that is true or not, may it be the last! In the midst of this sad and unsettling time, we come together today to faithfully continue on our spiritual Lenten pilgrimage as we celebrate this Second Sunday of Lent.

The Scripture Readings we have just heard record first and memorable events in salvation history for our reflection. These were special moments which God had provided for His people to help them (and to help us) to know more clearly who they are in their relationship with God.

In our First Reading from the first Book of God’s Revealed Word---the Book of Genesis--we are reminded of God’s tremendous love for His people through the conversation between God and Abram (Abraham’s original name before the covenant). In that conversation, God made Abram (and his elderly wife Sarah) a promise that seemed too good to be true: that they would not only have a child, but that the number of their children and descendants would be more numerous than the number of the stars in the universe. That moment was a “first” and quite memorable moment for the history of the world.

In today’s Gospel passage according to St. Luke, we heard that Jesus, as was His custom, decided to go up to the mountains to pray. But this time, He took along His three closest disciples: Peter, James and John. And while He was deep in prayer, He experienced what we have come to know as the “Transfiguration”. We pray about this special occasion as

the fourth Luminous Mystery of the Rosary. While Jesus was being transfigured, the three disciples, who were clearly not as involved in prayer, were sleeping. Suddenly, they awoke to see Jesus' "*appearance changed and his clothes dazzling white. And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah.*" Moses had been the great liberator of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, and the one to whom God had given the Ten Commandments and the Law; Elijah was the greatest of all the prophets who had faithfully and fearlessly spoken to the people on God's behalf. And while Peter was trying to tell Jesus that this was a moment that was so memorable----a "first" of enormous proportions---that they should figure out a way to keep it that way forever, God Himself spoke from the Heavens: "*This is My Chosen Son; listen to Him.*"

Just as suddenly as it began, it was all over. The voice of God was silent; Moses and Elijah vanished; Jesus' appearance and clothing returned to normal, and Jesus was telling the three men that it was time to go back down the mountain. St. Luke tells us that they came back down the mountain and "*did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen*". But I have no doubt that they relived that experience over and over again.

The Transfiguration was a gift from God the Father to His Son so that when the bad times came----His time of rejection, betrayal, torture, suffering and crucifixion----Jesus would have this vivid recollection of what happened on the "mountain top" to be His strength and what would keep Him going. As much as Peter's suggestion that they just stay there in that "glorious moment" might have appealed to Jesus, He knew that He had a mission to accomplish, and He could not accomplish it "up there"; He had to go "back down there"----He had to move forward steadily and faithfully toward the Cross.

Perhaps we can relate to that as well. We can all think of those happy times, or those "glory day" of our lives. Maybe there are days when we wish we could go back there---back to "the good ole days". We long for simpler times when we didn't have to wake up to stories of mass shootings, or worry about terroristic attacks. It is a blessing to have those happy memories in much the same way that the Transfiguration was for Jesus---to keep us going when our days are dark and the times of our lives are tough. But, as nice as it would be for us to "go back", we know that we too must keep steadily and faithfully moving forward in our life journey. That is why this season of Lent is such an important six weeks. During this time, we **re-focus** on what is important. We **re-mind** ourselves about our life's purpose. We **re-call** Who God is in our lives and how blessed we are to be loved so unconditionally by Him---how

blessed we are to be His precious Child. We **re-turn** to the Lord, and we become **re-conciled** with God and with one another if we have strayed or gotten off track.

Among those traditional Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving/works of charity, we offer them primarily asking God to strengthen that gift of faith during these days in which we live, with all that is good about them along with all that is upsetting and disturbing about them. This is our moment in time. Each time we make a choice for right instead of wrong, that is a very important “first”. Every time we make a decision to avoid violent reactions to situations of any sort, in favor of finding ways to work for peace and harmony, that is a special moment worth remembering and celebrating, even if only in our own hearts. Every one of those “victories” is a minor examples of “mountain top” experiences. But, as we realize today, we don’t live on the mountain-top; we live in the midst of the circumstances of our own day and time, including these awful events that leave us asking “Why?!”. It is in those moments that we **re-member** that what our Loving God said of His only-begotten Son Jesus, He also says of each of us: that we are His chosen, beloved children and He finds delight in us when we make choices and decisions according to His Word, and following the example of His Son, Jesus. St. Paul puts it even more beautifully in today’s Second Reading from his Letter to the Philippians: *“Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it, we await a Savior....Therefore, my brothers and sisters,...stand firm in the Lord.”*

God bless you, now and always.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Bishop Paul J. Bradley