

February 28, 2021

11:30 a.m.

St. Augustine Cathedral

Second Sunday of Lent

Today is the last day of the shortest month, and already the end of the second month of the year. As we begin the new month of March tomorrow, we are just about 3 weeks away from the first day of Spring! And while we know that there's probably still a lot of "unpleasant weather" still to come our way, since Winter in Michigan is far from over, the moderate temperatures and the bright sunshine have made these last few days quite pleasant.

Lent is also far from over; in fact, we're just beginning the Second of our Six-week Lenten Journey. Lent invites all of us to renew, and deepen, our relationship with God and neighbor---a relationship which was initiated through our Baptism into Christ. Lent urges us to "get back to the basics", in a spiritual sense---to remember who we are, and why we're here, and to do whatever it takes to keep us focused on our spiritual identity, trying to follow the "vision" that we have made for our life journey. How can we remain faithful to the Promises that we made, or were made for us, on the day of our Baptism? No matter how long ago that might be for all of us, those Promises need to remain what keeps us focused on "the vision" of what is ultimately most important in our lives.

Earlier this week, after having spent a few days with many of our priests at their annual Retreat in DeWitt, Michigan, I decided to take advantage of the nice weather when I returned to get my car washed. It was so filthy that I had almost forgotten what color it was. As the car (with me inside) was making its way through the automated Car Wash, with its brushes and jet-propelled streams of water ridding the car of the grime, dirt and muck of my recent travels, I thought to myself how much a car wash is like this time of Lent. Have you ever thought about that? Just as we put our car through what might look like extreme treatment of boiling water and forced back/forth and up/down cleaning, so too we willingly put ourselves through acts of Lenten sacrifice---prayer, fasting, self-denial, acts of charity---with the same end result in mind. My car came out looking almost new. Isn't that also our hope for Lent: that we can come out of our 40 days of Lent, being renewed to live more faithfully according to our Baptismal Promises, hopefully experiencing the "cleansing" of the Sacrament of Penance, and being made like "new" again in our relationship with God and neighbor thru the Love of Christ.

Each of the Readings from God's Holy Word, which we just heard proclaimed, clearly help us to recall our spiritual identity, which includes trying to follow God's Will as faithfully as we can.

In today's First Reading from the Book of Genesis, we heard about Abraham---the one we know as "the Father of Faith"---and the one who is revered by People of Faith belonging to the world's 3 major religions: Christians, Jews, and Muslims. After waiting literally all his life for the fulfillment of God's promise that he and his aged wife Sarah would have a child, which was realized with Isaac's birth when Abraham was 100 years old, today's Reading tells us, "*God put Abraham to the test*". Abraham's response to God when he called him was "*Here I am!*" If you've ever asked your kids---who wants to take out the garbage----Or if you've had to recruit volunteers to do a very difficult job----you can be certain that the vast majority of those in the room will either appear to not hear you, or have a very good excuse as to why they couldn't possibly do that. Rarely, would you get a response like "Here I am---I'd be happy to do that." So Abraham's willing and immediate response should have been an indicator that he wanted to do whatever God asked of him. But then, what was it that God asked of him? He was asked to do the "unthinkable": "*Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust.*" As we know, God's Angel stopped Abraham, and would not allow him to do that "unthinkable" act. That was the "ultimate test", and one in which Abraham proved that he loved God more than anyone or anything in this life.

As we continue our own life journeys, there's no doubt that at times, we encounter perplexing and challenging moments when we have to make major decisions, difficult choices, or dramatically change directions in our life journey. When those moments of "testing" take place, do we have a "Here I am"-attitude? Do we have enough Faith to look for God's Hand in what's happening---to take the time to prayerfully ask for God's guidance----and to move forward as best we can as "persons of faith"?

Today's Gospel is another dramatic example of coming to recognize God's Presence in our lives. Just as every year on the First Sunday of Lent we hear about one of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' Temptations, so too every year on the Second Sunday we hear one of the accounts of Jesus' Transfiguration. As a reminder, just a few days before this event, Jesus had shared with His Apostles the very disheartening news that He would very soon be going up to Jerusalem where He would suffer and die. That came as quite a shock, because the "vision" that they had formed for their life journey was that Jesus was leading them to a life of glory and success---

perhaps even that Jesus would overthrow the Romans' domination and re-establish Jewish sovereignty. So part of the reason Jesus took these 3 Apostles with Him to experience this "revelation" was to help to "renew their spirits", but also to give them an insight into the much more important "Vision" to which Jesus was leading them. The Apostles had come to love, respect and have great affection for Jesus in His humanness; now Jesus "pulled back the veil", so to speak, to allow them to see His divinity---to see Him as God's Divine Son, Eternal in Glory. Jesus allowed them to get a preview, of sorts, of the "end of the Story", after Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension. And when Moses, representing the Old Law----and Elijah, representing all the Prophets----appeared along with Jesus, it gave powerful evidence that Jesus, the Word Made Flesh, had fulfilled everything that the "Law and the Prophets" of the Old Testament had foretold.

Jesus wanted them----and all of us----to know that even in the midst of the times of great testing, human pain, and even when we find ourselves covered in the "dirtiness of sin"; He wants us to be sure that no fear, no darkness, no opposition, no amount of suffering---even Jesus' suffering and death, would be enough to defeat them----Jesus would always be with them!

And the most dramatic part of this Divine Revelation was the Voice of the Father speaking out of the cloud that enveloped them: "*This is My beloved Son; Listen to Him!*" Peter and the other Apostles wanted to stay there---absorbed by this sense of Peace and completeness. We all know that feeling. If we are experiencing any kind of "mountaintop" experience---a time of peace when all seems to be going well----we don't want to leave it. Like Peter, at those times, we might feel like saying: "let's just stop time and stay in this moment". But, as we all know, that's not life.

Life is full of "mountaintop" and "down in the valley" experiences; those "highs" and "lows" are both essential parts of our Life Journey. It's our Faith that helps us to keep our "vision for life" clear, and to keep our eyes focused on Jesus, by doing as the Father instructed the Apostles---by "Listening to Him". If we don't go through Life guided by faith, we will get lost, confused, or overwhelmed by those "moments of testing" that we all encounter. That is one, very important lesson that we can all learn on this Second Sunday of Lent. Wherever we are on our life journey, we shouldn't allow anything to overshadow the dazzling Presence of Christ Who remains with us no matter what. St. Paul told us that very clearly in today's Second Reading: *If*

God is for us, who (or what) can be against us?! Nothing---no-thing---can ultimately be against us when God is for us!

Even though God would not allow Abraham to commit the “unthinkable” act of sacrificing his only son, God did ask that very thing of Himself. God knew that the only way to restore unity between Himself and humanity was through the ultimate Sacrifice of His only-begotten Son. That is what we mean when we talk about “Good News”. Through Jesus’ death and Resurrection, we have been given a share in Jesus’ victory over sin and death---we have been given the Gift of Eternal Life.

Every time we come here to Mass, it should be like we are going “up the holy mountain” so that we can have that same kind of “glorious Transfiguration experience”. By paying attention to the Readings from God’s Holy Word, by receiving the very Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, and by being Blessed and Dismissed when the Mass is ended, sending us forth to “go back down the mountain” to the realities of our lives---throughout this time, we are being reminded: *“This is My beloved Son---in the Word---in the Eucharist----in all of us, baptized members of the Body of Christ; Listen to Him!”*

This time of Lent is so important to all of us. Our Lenten Sacrifices help us to share in the great Sacrifice that God Himself made for our Salvation, and help us to be united with the sufferings Jesus endured for us. But most of all, Lent is that time to help us “see” Jesus for Who He really is---in His Humanity and in His Divinity. Lent pleads with us to be clear about who we are. Through our Baptism into Christ, we too are so much more than what appears in our bodies; Baptism gives us the dignity of being God’s sons and daughters, brothers and sisters of Jesus Himself---and therefore, brothers and sisters of each other; Jesus’ Victory over Sin and Death gives us the Promise of Eternal Life.

We should allow Lent to do for our lives, what a Car Wash does for our car: to respond to God’s Will for us in our lives more like Abraham did by saying “Here I am”; to be cleansed of our sins through a good Lenten Confession; to be made like new in our relationship with God and neighbor; and to deepen our commitment to follow Christ faithfully, courageously and joyfully through our acts of prayer/fasting/self-denial/acts of charity.

And when we finally do pass from this world to the One that never ends, that’s when Peter’s request will be granted: *“Lord, it is so good for us to be here.”* Then we will be experiencing the

fullness of Life in the brilliant Light of God's Glory, where we will live on God's Holy Mountaintop forever.

God bless you!