

ECHOING GOD'S WORD
in
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
Second Sunday of Lent
February 25, 2024

SCRIPTURES READINGS:

Genesis 22:1-18	Abraham is willing to obey God.
Romans 8:31-34	God gives us everything in giving us Jesus.
Mark 9:2-10	Jesus shows his glory in a glimpse of the resurrection.

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the Scriptures carefully in your group, beginning with the Gospel. Take a few minutes in silence to hear the Lord speaking to the heart. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the Church community. What does God want the community to hear today?

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

Mark:

Mark anticipates already the scene on Mount Calvary where Jesus will be revealed in glory as his heart is pierced with the centurion's lance. Jesus is very explicit in pointing to his death and resurrection as the final revelation and meaning of his life and his teaching. This is the measure of God's love for his faithful people.

On Mount Sinai, Moses, too, was transfigured in glory. Where God is, his servants become radiant. From the cloud, we hear the same voice we heard at his baptism, with the addition that we should "listen to him," as was said of Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15). Moses represents the Law, Torah; Elijah represents the prophets. The booths that Peter proposes are signs of God's dwelling in the midst of his people.

Jesus says that this divine presence cannot be complete until his death and resurrection have occurred.

Disciples need to be nourished by the Master. We cannot long continue in discipleship without being fed by the power and spirit of the one whom we follow. Christian disciples must stay close to Christ, must continue to listen to his teaching, must observe the power of his works, must recline at table with him and lay their heads on his breast.

In the Church community, we encounter him in intimacy. We listen to him in the Scriptures proclaimed. We receive power and authority from outpourings of his Spirit. We share his body and blood in Eucharist. We commune with him in prayer. Thus, the disciples of today also are nurtured and strengthened. They, too, are transformed into his likeness. Mark uses every occasion to teach the disciples of Jesus, those who lived in the last quarter of the first Christian century. He has Jesus teaching his disciples so that the disciples of every age after that will also be taught by Jesus. His disciples are most often slow to understand and quite dimwitted. Mark is saying something about disciples in his day and ours!

Genesis:

The Book of Genesis is not just an ordinary history of our origins as a human race, not even just the story of the origins of the Jewish people. It is not *history* in the sense in which we know it today. Genesis is primarily a *testament* or a *religious witness account* of origins. The *values and commitments* underlying the narratives are the message, not the brute facts. These are faith stories, treasured by a faithful people, for the sake of handing on the faith from one generation to the other. Christians read Genesis with a still further meaning. For example, Abraham represents God the Father who is willing to give up what is the very dearest to him, his own son. In the Christian Scriptures, God will literally give up the life of his Son, Jesus Christ, to death on the cross. We are stunned into silence at the sacrifice of the Son of God.

We stand in silent awe as Abraham raises the knife over the chest of his only son, Isaac. We do not understand either scene. We simply bow our heads and obey!

Romans:

In the Letter to the Romans, St. Paul presents a highly refined theological discourse. Following the style and form of public debates in the Greek world, Paul lays out the teaching that Christians have nothing to fear from persecutions since God has already proved his love for them by sending his Son to the hill of Calvary, just as Abraham brought his son to the mountain for sacrifice.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Peter said, “Lord, it is good for us to be here.” Describe your experience of a time when you felt close to God. Were you comforted by that closeness? Comparing your experience with that of the disciples of Jesus, what purpose do you think the Lord has in allowing us to feel the beauty and goodness of his presence?

2. Moses and Elijah appear to verify that Jesus has now assumed the roles of lawgiver and spokesperson for God. When the disciples “saw only Jesus,” what were they to conclude? That the law and the prophets were now fulfilled? That Jesus is to be heard now, as completing the law and the prophets? Why do you think we do not spontaneously come to that conclusion when we too “see only Jesus” now?

3. What comfort and assurance do you find in the community of the Church that has preserved and shared with us the story of the Transfiguration? Do you see the Church community as comforting and assuring the world? What would your parish community need to do to make more visible to all its comforting and reassuring role?

PRAYING TOGETHER

Read out loud the passage from Romans 8:31-34. Offer some prayer of praise for the wonder of God’s love in your life. Pray for the Church.

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) invited Catholics of the whole world to expand their understanding of God's presence in their lives. God is present to us not only as creator of the universe but especially as wholly and totally present in Jesus Christ. In Jesus of Nazareth, the Living God has been inserted into human affairs in a most unique way. He has come to live among us. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." "The Word was with God and the Word was God." "He came among his own people, although they did not recognize him." "He pitched his tent in the midst of our lives."

In the life and ministry of Jesus, the God of Israel entered into the human realm as one of us. He shared our condition as finite creatures, our human ability to know and to love God, our living and our dying.

The council also makes it clear that Jesus is present in the Church community, in the assembly of faith gathered for prayer and for service to God's creation. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the heavenly Father has fashioned a body for Jesus Christ -- from the members of that body that we are through our faith and our baptism. Christ is truly present in and through the body of the Church, all who belong to Jesus Christ.

The council goes so far as to assert that the Church is the "sacrament of Christ," making the invisible, Risen Lord, truly present and visible in the members of the Church. Just as Jesus makes the Father present and visible in time, the Church makes Christ real and available in the community.

In the seven sacraments and in many other ways, Christ comes to nurture and to sustain his brothers and sisters in the faith community. When the community gathers to celebrate the sacred mysteries, the assembly comes under the shadow of the heavenly Father, just as Jesus did in the Transfiguration. The disciples on Mount Tabor were overshadowed by the power and the glory of God, revealing Jesus as the Christ and Savior of the world.

The "cloud of God's power and mercy" hovers over the church assembly to reveal the presence and the ministry of Jesus through the members of the Church. Just as Israel was led through the desert under the shadow of God's might toward the Land of Promise, so today, the Church community is led by God to the heavenly kingdom. Moses and Elijah, the Twelve Apostles, and the whole company of the saints appear with Jesus among us to reveal God's love for all humans.

See: The Catechism of the Catholic Church: #787-796

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