

Second Sunday of Lent March 20, 2011

Readings: Genesis 12:1-4a; 2 Timothy 1:8b-10; Matthew 17:1-9

Bear Your Share of Hardship

I don't know if any of you are interested in genealogy and tracing your family tree. In general, this has not been something of great interest to me. I usually look to the future. But a few years ago I stumbled upon the Ellis Island Web site on the internet. You can enter the name of an ancestor who immigrated to the United States and find out when they were processed through Ellis Island. You can also get additional information about them and the ship they arrived on. My grandfather, my mom's dad, came to this country from Belgium in 1914 when he was 25 years old. I found out that he left out of Antwerp and travelled on a ship named the Kroonland. He left my grandmother behind in Belgium with their one year old son, my Uncle Joe. Grandma and Uncle Joe did not come to the United States to join him until five years later in 1919. They travelled from France on a ship named the Zeppelin.

I don't know much about my grandpa's faith life—he died when I was only five—but he was willing to venture off to a far-away land to try to make a better life for his new family. For this, he was willing to leave his homeland and his family. As much as I try, I can't imagine putting myself in his shoes and doing the same thing. I can't conceive that I could have gotten into a boat to sail to an unknown country and leave my wife at home when our first child was only one year old; to leave my parents and siblings; to leave my homeland. But he was willing to trust and to accept sacrifices to do the right thing out of love. And trust and willingness to accept sacrifice are two major themes that we hear about in our first two readings today.

The thought of my grandparents' travels came to mind as I reflected on today's passage from the Book of Genesis. God said to Abram: ***“Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you.”*** And our passage ends with the very important line: ***“Abram went as the LORD directed him.”*** Abram trusted God and did what God directed him to do even though he couldn't understand it; even if it meant leaving his family and making great sacrifices. God promised that He would make of Abram a great nation, but Abram knew that his wife was barren. And still he trusted in God's promise.

God spoke to Abram and told him clearly what he should do. And Abram did it. Many people will say to me that they wish God would speak to them as clearly as he did to Abraham, or Moses, or Elijah. If only God would speak to them that clearly, then they would know what they should do and then they would surely follow God's commands as well. If only God would speak to them when they looked up at the stars or stood on a mountaintop, life would be so much easier.

But God does speak to us, maybe not in the same way as he spoke to our first fathers, but he speaks to us all the same. He speaks to us through the Church. The problem isn't that God isn't speaking; the problem may be that we aren't listening; we don't want to hear what He has to say. Abram did as the Lord directed him, but we do not.

In our gospel, God spoke from the cloud and said: ***“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him.”*** God sent His Son to us, and that Son, Jesus Christ, is the head of the Church that he established before He returned to the Father. And through Christ's teachings, through the teachings of His Church, God speaks to us about what we ought to do and about

what we ought not do. But often we don't listen to what we have already been very clearly told, and then we complain that God never speaks to us. He's got to be shaking His head up in heaven. I can imagine Him saying: "I sent them a book of information on how to behave and worship and pray—the Catechism—and they won't read it or follow it. And now they want me to call them up, or tap them on the shoulder, individually and give them some personal advice. If I could trust them to do the little things as I have taught them, maybe I would talk to them about bigger things."

The problem isn't that God isn't speaking to us, it is that we aren't listening very well. And a big part of the reason is that we are not willing to make sacrifices. St. Paul tells us today: "***Bear your share of hardship for the gospel.***"

As we progress through Lent, a good question to ask ourselves is: "Am I willing to bear my share of hardship for the gospel?" Are we willing to make sacrifices like Abram, like my grandfather, to do the right thing, to follow God's call? Or do we only want to follow Jesus when it is easy?

We are willing to make sacrifices for those we love or to achieve some goal in life. Lent is a good time to practice making sacrifices for the love of God and our neighbor; to be willing to make sacrifices to attain the ultimate goal, eternal life in heaven.

Lent is a good time to increase our prayer life as we have been taught by the example of Jesus and the saints. Through the Catechism, God teaches us much about how our prayer life can grow. You might want to pick it up and check it out.

Lent is a season of conversion; a time to grow closer to God so that we can hear Him more clearly in the everyday pulse of the world around us. Many of the practices you accept as part of this season should be ones that you will carry on beyond the Lenten season. We can't take two steps forward and two steps back when Lent is over; we will make no progress on our journeys that way. Maybe we can take two steps forward and only one step back so that after Lent you will devote more time to prayer than you did before Lent started. You will add more fasting and sacrifice to your life year around. You will be charitable and help those in need more readily the whole year around.

Trust God and be willing to bear your share of sacrifice for the gospel. It's a good recipe for a fruitful and productive Lenten season.

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