

So here we are in Lent. Remember that Lent is the forty day period of preparation for Jesus' suffering and dying on the cross and His resurrection on Easter in order to save us from our sins (as we discussed last week). There's lots *more* to learn today.

The Old Testament reading today comes from the Book of Genesis. There's a word. *Genesis*. Genesis means beginning or origin or start. And if you were going to include a book in the Bible called Genesis, where would be a good place to put it? Of course, at the beginning. And so it is that Genesis is the first book in the Bible. Even the first three words in the Bible in Genesis are, "In the beginning," describing the beginning of God's creation, the earth, and all that is on it. Then Genesis describes the beginning of the Jewish people, and how they came to Israel and how they went to Egypt. The next four books in the Bible—Genesis plus the next four books in the Bible are called the Pentateuch—describe how they finally were able to leave Egypt and come back to Israel. Last week's first reading also came from one of those four books. I'm sure you remember that it was about Moses teaching the Israelites how to pray, reminding them that God is always there for them. Hundreds of years *before* Moses, or about 2,400 years before *Jesus*, Abram was born—he later would become Abraham. Abram was a very religious man who loved God. The Bible describes him as God's friend. Abram was the first person in the Bible (after Adam and Eve) to whom God actually spoke. God chose Abram to settle a new land which would become Israel. God led Abram to this land and then promised that his descendants would inherit the land. There's another word. *Descendant*. Here is an example of what a descendant is. My great grandfather came here from Sicily in Italy during the late 1800s and had a son, who was my grandfather, who in turn had a son who was my father, who had a son who was me, who is me (Who am me? Who am I?) Who am I? Well, I'll tell you who I am. My grandfather, my father, and I are all descendants of my great grandfather. We were all children of children of children of my great grandfather. That's what descendants are. So, God promised that

Abram's descendants would inherit this new land. There was just one problem. Abram was old, and so was his wife, Sarah. In order to have descendants, you have to start by having children, and they didn't have any children. But you know what they say (at least a dozen times in the Bible), "Nothing is impossible with God."

...which finally brings us to today's Old Testament reading (which, is omitted according to the Lectionary for Masses with Children but optionally included here because of the applicability of its message).

A reading from the book of Genesis (**Gen 15:5-8, 18**).

The Lord God took Abram outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Your children, and your children's children, and their children, and all of their descendants will be just as numerous." Abram believed the Lord God, and the Lord God gave credit to Abram for his belief. The Lord God then said to him, "I am the Lord God who brought you from Ur to give you this land as a possession. Abram then asked, "O Lord God, how can I know that I shall possess it?" The Lord God made a promise to Abram at this time saying, "I give this land; from the Wadi River of Egypt to the Great River, the Euphrates; to your children, their children, their children's children, and all of your descendants." The Word of the Lord.

You know, here in New Jersey and in most densely populated cities and suburbs, there are a lot of lights on earth at night. So on a clear night, if you look up at the sky, you may only see a few stars. But do you think they had a lot of city lights when God took Abram out to look up at the sky 4,400 years ago? I rather doubt it. So what do you think Abram saw when he looked up that night? I would say he saw a whole lot of stars. How many? Do you think you could count them? I don't think so. So how many descendants was God promising to Abram? That would be a whole lot of descendants. But remember that Abram and Sarah didn't have any children. In order to have descendants, like we just said, your children have to have children who have to have

children, and so on. And your children can't have any children unless you have children in the first place. Got it? Well, Abram got it. He had no idea how God was going to fulfill His promise, what with his wife, Sarah, and he being old and with no children. But he had faith in God. And sure enough this old couple was blessed with a son they named Isaac, which is the subject of a different Sunday. By the way, do you know who was a direct descendent of Abram? That would be Jesus.

Today's Psalm (**Psalm 27:1, 7-8**)

The Lord is my life and my salvation.

The Lord is my life and my salvation.

The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom should I fear; of whom should I be afraid?

The Lord is my life and my salvation.

Hear, O Lord, the sound of my call; have pity on me and answer me. My heart speaks of You; I look for You.

The Lord is my life and my salvation.

It's time for St. Paul's reading to the Philippians. You know that St. Paul was often referred to as the thirteenth apostle. After Jesus ascended into heaven, St. Paul was chosen by Him when He knocked Paul, who's name at the time was still Saul, off his horse and asked him, "Why are you persecuting Me?" At the time Saul was running around gathering up Christians in order to put them in jail and persecute them just because they believed in Jesus. After he was knocked off his horse, not only did St. Paul stop persecuting Christians, but he traveled around the Mediterranean world converting pagans to Christianity, as he did in Philippi in Greece. But this wasn't an easy task. The Philippians were being taught, by some people who claimed to be Christians, about adherence to laws, many of which were not that

important to faith in Jesus Christ, because they distracted the people from the true teachings of Jesus. So St. Paul wrote them this letter—he was actually in prison at the time—to get their faith readjusted and get them back on track, believing in Christ for the real reason, which is that He is the Son of God and He died for our sins.

A reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Philippians (**Phil 3:18, 20-4:1**).

Many people, as I have often told you, now even with tears in my eyes, behave as if Christ did not suffer for us. But we are waiting for our life in heaven with our savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our earthly bodies to be like his glorified heavenly body, by His power which enables Him to do all things. Therefore, my sisters and brothers, whom I love, in this way we will stand firm with the Lord. The Word of the Lord.

In the first sentence St. Paul says, “...as I have told you, now even with tears in my eyes...” So it sounds like he wasn’t very happy that all of his work, that is, when he had visited the Philippians and first taught them about Christianity and what it means to be a Christian, was falling apart after the Philippians listened to those other guys telling them the wrong stuff about Jesus. So he explains again what will happen after we die. Then he says, “Therefore, my sisters and brothers, whom I love...” In other words, he doesn’t want these people to go wrong. He cares about them. “...in this way we will stand firm with the Lord.” What does it mean to stand firm? It means to stand up and resist. St. Paul wants the Philippians and us to resist changing from our faith in the true meaning of Christianity to some other false beliefs.

Now it’s time for the gospel. As you know, the gospel readings come from the writings of Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They wrote about what happened when Jesus was alive. Not all of their stories are the same, but sometimes they wrote about the same thing. Remember last week’s gospel about the temptation of Jesus by the devil? That story was written in the different gospels. And today we read about the

transfiguration. This is also a well-known gospel story because, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all wrote about it. This year we hear Luke's version (without the dove). But the stories are similar to each other. By the way, there's another word. *Transfiguration*. A transfiguration is a change in form or appearance. And that's what happened to Jesus right in front of Peter, James, and John.

Remember that the gospel acclamation, the verse before the gospel, does not include "alleluia" during Lent.

Glory and praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

Glory and praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

From the shining cloud the Father's voice is heard: This is My beloved Son. Hear Him.

Glory and praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

+ A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke (**Luke 9:28-36**).
Glory to You, O Lord.

Jesus took Peter, John, and James with Him and went up on a mountain to pray. While He was praying, His face changed, and His clothes became shining white. Suddenly Moses and Elijah were there speaking with Him. They appeared in heavenly glory and talked about all that Jesus' death in Jerusalem would mean, Peter and the other two disciples had been sound asleep. All at once they woke up and saw how glorious Jesus was. They also saw the two men who were with Him. Moses and Elijah were about to leave when Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here! Let us make three tents, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But Peter did not know what he was talking about. While Peter was still speaking, a shadow of a cloud passed over them. From the cloud, a voice spoke, "This is My chosen Son. Listen to what He says!" After the voice had spoken, Peter,

John, and James saw only Jesus. For some time they kept quiet and did not say anything about what they had seen. The gospel of the Lord.

So what happened to Jesus on the top of the mountain? Well, His clothes turned a bright white. His face was also a bright dazzling white. We call this the transfiguration of Jesus. Think of a light bulb. When there's no electricity, it looks like just a glass object with a tear drop shape. But when you connect it to electricity, it lights up the room. Its true essence is to give off light. And so it was with Jesus. To His apostles and friends, it was too easy to think of Him as just good old Jesus, the teacher, forgetting that this man was the Son of God. But with the transfiguration, they saw this bright white appearance of Jesus which came from within, showing Peter, James, and John Jesus' glorious divinity, in other words, showing them that He was indeed the Son of God.

But there's more to this story. While He was transfigured, Jesus was speaking with Moses and the prophet Elijah. Then the voice from the cloud said, "This is My Son. Listen to what *He* says!" That voice was, of course, God's voice. Then suddenly Jesus looked normal again, and Elijah and Moses had disappeared. So Jesus was transfigured because He is the Son of God. We get that. But what's the deal with Moses & Elijah? Well, Moses wrote the laws, 613 of them to be exact, to govern Jewish behavior, and Elijah was one of the great prophets. And all that Moses and Elijah had to say in the Scriptures was well and good and considered important by the Jewish people. But here we have God Himself telling the three apostles that were there to listen to what *Jesus* says. Peter, James, and John were Jews. They were brought up in the Jewish tradition. God was telling them that what matters is what *Jesus* tells them. That's easy for you to figure out. Here you are listening to this story two thousand years later, but what you know that the disciples did not know yet was that Jesus would die on the cross to save us from our sins and then arise from the dead. They didn't know that yet. But they had to find out about it and accept it as God's plan for the redemption of mankind. St. Paul was having the

same problem with the Philippians. They were being pressured to retain the old ways of the laws of Moses more importantly than Jesus' teachings. But in the transfiguration God, the Father, and Jesus, His Son (and Abram's descendant), showed the Apostles and us that what *Jesus* says is what matters. *Jesus'* teachings, the Word of God, will earn us eternal happiness with Him in heaven. *This* is what Christians are supposed to believe.

And that, girls and boys, is the lesson in today's readings.

The Second Sunday of Lent, 2022
Joseph Calderone

P.S. You know, sometimes we listen to the priest or whomever is preaching the gospel and the sermon, and we get a little drowsy, or distracted (you think?). Then it's time to do what we call profess our faith, when we say the Creed, "I believe in God, the Father almighty..." and we almost put ourselves to sleep saying what we believe in. But you know, this is our faith we are talking about. This is what Christians believe. Countless people have died for their faith in Jesus. It shouldn't put us to sleep. We shouldn't be bored with it. So the next time you get to that part of Mass, let's tell God and each other what we believe, what we truly believe, what truly makes us Catholics. And let's say it like we really mean it.