



BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF CHICAGO

Reflections for 2nd Sunday in Lent
March 16, 2025
Sr. Virginia Jung

Genesis 15: 5-12, 17-18
Philippians 3: 17-4:1
Luke 9: 28b-36

As I was reading and reflecting on today's Scriptures in preparation for talking with you this morning, I thought, maybe I can relate these readings to faith, hope, and love. Abram's characteristic virtue is faith, and it leads him into cutting this first covenant with God. St. Paul speaks about hope, stressing that we are living into our true citizenship in heaven, but I was having a hard time relating the story of the Transfiguration to love. Until, I read the Wisdom commentary on this gospel which ended with a reference to St. Oscar Romero's understanding of the Transfiguration, but it was just a paraphrase with a footnote to a theological journal. This sent me to my little book of his writings that I am reading for Lent. I skimmed through it until I was happy to find an excerpt of a homily he gave on these same readings on March 2, 1980, so in 1980, the 2nd Sunday of Lent must have been March 2, and in that passage, he talks about the importance and power of love. So, there you have it.

In the first reading, we hear of Abram's experience which was a reward for his deep faith in God and which no doubt was formative, deepening his faith even more. As breathtaking as it must have been to look up into a sky full of stars, hearing God's promise to you of descendants without end, it must have been terrifying to witness to the establishment of the bloody, fiery, smokey first covenant between God and the people of God. The author tells us that "a great dark dread descended upon Abram" and given the context, that is understandable, but Abram perseveres and receives God's promise of land. These promises have comforted and inspired the faithful over many thousands of years and they have also been misinterpreted and used to take advantage of other groups over thousands of years. This is something that we need to take to heart and change our hearts in our current times.

In my study Bible, Graziano Marcheschi wrote the commentary for Genesis and regarding the entire story of Sarah and Abraham, he talks about several ways that we can read it, concluding with "Perhaps the most religiously fruitful way of reading Genesis 12-25 is to see it as a study of Abraham and Sarah's struggle to continue believing in and trusting God. They struggle because, like most believers, Abraham and Sarah create almost as many obstacles to God's plan as they do faith-filled responses." Nowadays, people like to say, sometimes seriously, sometimes jokingly, "The struggle is real." And it is. Deep, steady faith does not eliminate the need for discernment.

Even the focused, simple life that St. Paul encourages his fellow Christians to adopt, requires discernment. Probably even more so than a life that just mindlessly follows society's norms. Even a life focused on the promise of salvation and heavenly glory requires decision-making and

choice – choosing to live simply and for the good of others in the here and now. So, our hope is anchored in the Cross of Christ and it is very much anchored in the present and with a willingness to take up that Cross in the ways life hands us, not in a fatalistic way, but in a dynamic way, always praying to God and in dialogue with other people.

When I first read the gospel for today, I had that experience one sometimes has of feeling like I was hearing something for the first time, when in reality, I have heard and read this gospel numerous times over my life. It was the phrase – his exodus – with lower case e in exodus. I wondered whose exodus? What does this mean? I never heard this before! Luke writes: “And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.” The commentaries cleared that up – it is Jesus’ exodus, and it means his passion, death, resurrection, and ascension which all took place in Jerusalem and like the Exodus with a capital E, it extends to us as his followers. This is discipleship – death will mean the same for us as we, like Jesus, hear God’s voice choosing us and respond by choosing God, choosing to be imitators of Jesus, to live the way he teaches us.

I thought it was so interesting that the Wisdom commentary subtitles the section on the Transfiguration as a discernment experience for Jesus. That Jesus went to pray, to know the path he should choose, that everything was not spelled out for him, he was not a robot programmed for salvation. They say that his change in appearance is when he understands God’s call, similar to Moses and Hannah. And that Jesus is able to discuss this passage with Moses and Elijah. I find that comforting, that Jesus was not going through this tremendous discernment alone. In addition to Moses and Elijah, He had his own disciples as witnesses, to see what is promised, to be inspired, and to share it with the community. So we also, can know that we are chosen and we have to make a choice ourselves to follow and to continually renew that commitment throughout our lives. They mentioned that St. Oscar Romero stressed that light conquers darkness and the way of the Cross is the way for us to be transfigured. I thought that was kind of vague, so I went to my own book and found this excerpt from his homily, given about 3 weeks before he was murdered. Remember that he was speaking in a country that had been in an authoritarian government and civil war for a long time.

Let us not think, brothers and sisters, that our dead have departed from us. Their heaven, their eternal reward, perfects them in love. They continue to love the same causes for which they died. Which means that in El Salvador this liberating force not only counts on those who remain alive, but also on all those who they tried to kill, and who are more present than ever in this process of the people.

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There it is, love. For us, the Transfiguration is a vision of Jesus perfected in love and a reminder that this great love lives in each of us. Like Jesus, conversing with Moses and Elijah, we are surrounded by all of the great lovers who have gone before us and who are present with us in the history that we are creating today, whether that is in our Benedictine community or in our American nation. And in any other crisis you might find yourself in at this time. Certainly, Oscar Romero was killed only in his body; his love, his voice, his encouragement live on in the process of people all over the world. Scripture and the writings and lives of the saints and our ancestors are gifts that we are meant to use, in quiet reflection and in the conscious, active choices every day.