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Second Sunday of Lent - 25 February 2024

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25 February 2024

Second Sunday of Lent

Reflection by Michele Purcell

Introduction

Today's readings emphasise God's faithfulness. The reading from Genesis assures us of God's blessings for Abraham and for us. The Psalm exhorts us to trust in God's presence at all times and Saint Paul reassures us that Jesus will stand with us in this life and the next. Mark's Gospel does the same – and urges us to always trust God by following Jesus.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you are the Son of God. Lord have mercy.

You teach us to listen. Christ have mercy.

You are the glory of God. Lord have mercy.

Collect

The Oration

O God, who have commanded us

to listen to your beloved Son,

be pleased, we pray,

to nourish us inwardly by your word,

that, with spiritual sight made pure,

we may rejoice to behold your glory.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

God, for ever and ever.

The initial focus of the opening collect for the second Sunday in Lent is upon the discipline of listening. If Christ is the Word incarnate, we, his followers, are essentially listeners, hearers of the word. Interestingly, in the midst of the seasonal fast God is not named in this seventh-century Spanish prayer as one who desires us to be hungry but rather as one who has commanded us to listen. Our Lenten discipline ought to make us more receptive to the word. From this foundation, the prayer sets several images at play. Having called up our sense of hearing, the

oration introduces our sense of hunger: we are to be nourished by the divine word and seek the grace to sharpen our appetite for this word. Our hunger and hearing are then related to our sight. Fed by the word, our spiritual sense of sight is healthier, and we are more fully able to see God's glory and rejoice. The Lenten discipline of the senses results in sharper hearing, a healthier appetite and more pure sight for the joy of beholding the divine glory.

Acknowledgement

The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by Gerard Moore for the Canadian liturgical journal *Celebrate!* (Novalis Press). Our thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

First Reading

Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18

Do not raise your hand against the boy. Do not harm him.

This ancient, violent and puzzling story must be carefully interpreted in order to avoid the mistake of imagining our Creator God would ever desire or demand violence to be inflicted upon anyone.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 115(116):10, 15-19

I will walk in the presence of the Lord in the land of the living.

Today's Psalm is a song of trust and praise for God's faithfulness to us. 'O precious (i.e. costly) in the eyes of the Lord is the death of (even one of) his faithful'.

Second Reading

Romans 8:31-34

With God on our side who can be against us?

Saint Paul assures us that Christ, the risen Jesus, is always acting for us as our mediator with God. We cannot be separated from the love of Christ who stands always by our side.

Gospel Reading

Mark 9:2-10

This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!

Reflection

Mark places the transfiguration story at the beginning of Chapter 9 in his Gospel. Just before this event Jesus had been walking with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi and had asked them, 'Who do you say that I am?' Peter had answered, 'You are the Messiah' (8:27-29). Then Jesus began teaching them what it *really* meant for him to be the Messiah. He would be rejected by those in power and be killed and after three days would rise again. Jesus then included the crowd in his teaching - and he assured them that *all* who follow him would suffer the same fate (8:31-34).

Peter protested to Jesus about this teaching, but was firmly silenced by Jesus' words, 'Get behind me, Satan' (Mark 8:33). Peter was meant to *follow* Jesus and not try to control him.

The narration of the Transfiguration which follows allows Mark to dramatically illustrate God's approval of what Jesus had just taught – that as Messiah – he would suffer and die before rising again. The event also confirms to Peter, James and John that Jesus is indeed God's beloved Son and that they should listen to him (9:7).

The significance of the appearance of Moses and Elijah 'talking with Jesus' in the transfiguration scene would have been obvious to those in Mark's audience who were familiar with their scriptures. Both were great prophets. They had both directly encountered God on a mountain top. Moses was the receiver of the Law and Elijah was a prophet and miracle worker. Both had suffered as a result of their fidelity to God's call: (Exodus 16:1-3; 17:1-3; 32 and 1 Kings 18-19; 21; 2 Kings 1).

Peter, James, and John were not at all reassured by this vision. In fact, 'They were terrified' (9:6). Peter impulsively called to Jesus, addressed him as 'Rabbi' and suggested they mark the occasion by building three tents or dwellings, one each for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. God however did not endorse this plan. Straight away the voice of God was manifest in a cloud which overshadows them. They heard God say, 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him!' (9:7).

All that is needed is for Jesus' followers to keep their eyes on Jesus and listen to him!

God's announcement to the three disciples is similar to the words spoken to Jesus alone at his Baptism: 'You are my Son, the Beloved: with you I am well pleased' (1:11). Now, however, the announcement affirming Jesus' divine identity (9:7) is more public – it is made to the three disciples – and to us – the readers of Mark's Gospel.

After this declaration the vision disappears and 'when they looked round, they saw no one with them anymore but only Jesus' (9:8). From now on Jesus must become

their focus. Moses and the Prophets had prepared the way for Jesus, but now God's message is wholly evident in the person of Jesus.

The last two verses of today's Gospel show the disciples puzzling about what they had witnessed and questioning the meaning of 'rising from the dead'. This discussion and wondering, in a community of three, is a positive outcome from the transfiguration experience for the disciples. It describes the process of wise discernment. The last verses show, too, that regardless of euphoric or transcendent religious experiences, we all need to go back down the mountain with Jesus. We need to live our day to day lives watching and listening to Jesus whose life reveals to us the love and faithfulness and the mission that God has for each one of us.

In the Genesis reading for today, we read the brutal story about Abraham being willing to sacrifice his son at the bizarre command of God. This story has captured the imagination of scripture scholars and artists for thousands of years. As a child I had no problem accepting the story which I read in my small Bible History Book. Since becoming a parent, however, I have very many questions about it.

What kind of a God would ask anyone to kill a child for any reason? God had twice intervened to save the lives of Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 16: 7-15 and Genesis 21:17-21), so was it not ridiculous that God would order the murder of Isaac? Where was Sarah in this narrative? How did Isaac feel about his father's deception and willingness to kill him? And when Abraham returned from the mountain, how did these events affect his relationship with Sarah and Isaac?

But these are the wrong questions. The only questions we need to ask are:

What do we learn about God from this ancient legend which was written – not for the minds of 21st century people – but for very different ancient minds?

And, how does that help us to follow Jesus?

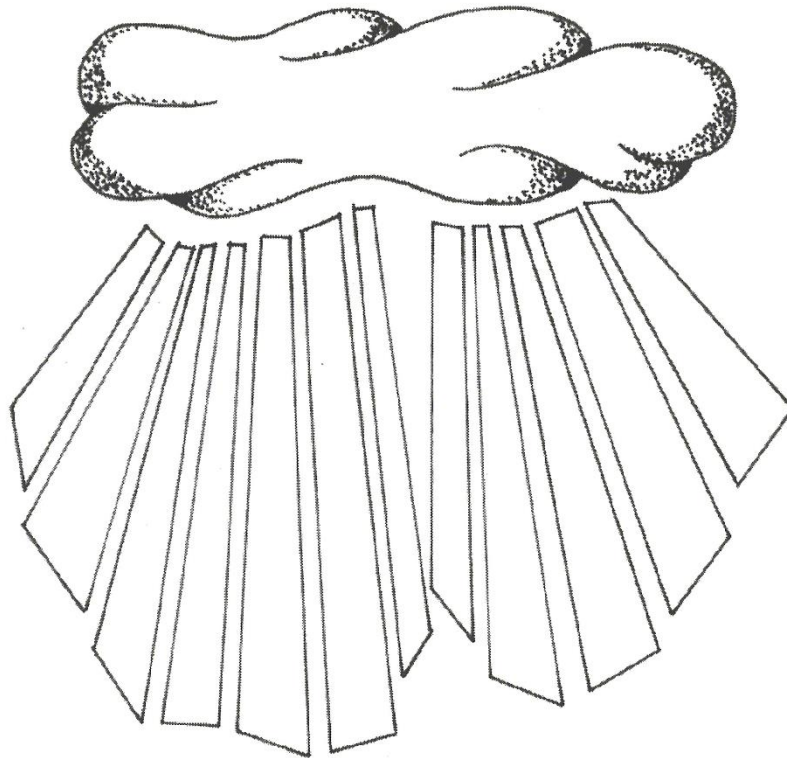
As followers of Jesus, we cannot believe God would ever command the destruction of either the natural world or any of the creatures God has created. From listening to this story, we simply learn that God continued to be faithful to Abraham – and does so for us as well. God is loving and faithful to us despite any – and all – of our wilful and just plain naïve misunderstandings of what God *actually* wants us to do.

Why place this story in today's liturgy – alongside the Transfiguration?

Could it be that Abraham was as much in the dark about what God was *really* calling him to do as were Peter, James, and John as they climbed to receive their epiphanies on their respective mountains? Abraham was as impulsive in his way as was Peter in today's Gospel. Both were proved wrong about God. In the end it was God who assured Abraham and Peter of God's faith in *them!* God acted to save Isaac's life. Despite Abraham's mistaken belief – God then lovingly blessed him for his faith. Despite Peter's denial – and our own – that to follow Jesus is to open

ourselves to suffering, we are lovingly and simply reminded,' This is my Son the Beloved. Listen to him.'

This is the very simple (but never very easy) message for the second week of Lent: 'Listen to him!'



**This is my
beloved. Listen!**

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

People of God, we are called today to listen to a God who loves us. So let us place before God all our needs and the needs of our world, knowing that God will listen.

Petitions

We pray for the leaders of our Church. May Pope Francis and all our leaders, clerical and lay, always trust God by following Jesus and become one through the synodal journey.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for world leaders and all who assert power in political and economic realms. May they be opened by the Holy Spirit to seek justice instead of power, to seek peace instead of conflict, to seek prosperity for all people instead of personal wealth.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those who struggle to believe in the love and compassion of God. May they be enlightened through the witness of all Christians who listen to Jesus.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those who are enduring suffering and hardship especially in Gaza and Ukraine and other war torn areas. May they find some respite and generosity through those who are determined to care for their lives and wellbeing.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for ourselves as we receive the gospel in our hearts. May we truly listen to Jesus and come closer in understanding our loving and faithful God.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those who grieve for family and friends who have died and now live in God's care. May they be comforted by those around them and find peace and strength.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

God of all compassion, we know that you hear all our needs and fully care for us and for all of creation. We offer this prayer through the power of the Spirit and in the name of Jesus, the Christ.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	AOVK	CWB	CWBII	GA
All that is hidden	127					
Be thou my vision	9			733	455	
Christ is the world's light				643	467	
Eye has not seen	146					466
For the faces that I know			137			
From ashes to the living font					289	
God, your glory we have seen in your Son				695		
Great God of mercy					126	
Holy, holy, holy Lord God almighty				712		
Jesus on the mountain peak					433	
O God beyond all praising					566	
O Sun of Justice, fill our hearts					178/179	2
O raise your eyes and see					434	
Open my eyes	166				582	
Praise to you, O Christ, our Saviour	28				587	407
Seek, O seek the Lord				802	595	211
The glory of these forty days				825	301	
The Lord is my light (Willcock)		73		594	481	28
There's a wideness in God's mercy				838	624	
Tis good, Lord, to be here					435	
Tree of life					300	307
We remember	81					446
Word of God, come down on earth					644	

Title	S&S2
Transfigure us, O Lord	309

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 115: *I will walk in the presence of the Lord, in the land of the living.*

	CWB	GA	JOBB	LPB	PM2
Psalm 115	212	66	pg. 27	pg. 37	pg. 106

Music selections by Michael Mangan

You are the light (FWS) *Based on Ps 26/27* [Gathering, Gifts]

Be with us (FWS) *Based on Ps 90/91* [Gathering, Gifts]

Create a new heart (FWS) *Based on Ps 50/51* [Gathering, Gifts, Recessional]

This is the time (TT) [Gathering, Gifts, Recessional]

Lenten acclamation (TT) [Gospel Acclamation]

Lenten gospel acclamation – Mass Jubilee (MJC) [Gospel Acclamation]

Turn back to God (TT/SYJ) [CHILDREN: Gathering, Recessional]