

2nd Sunday of Lent “Following God to an Unknown Land”

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That first line from book of Genesis seems so appropriate this week. “The Lord 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.’” There are a couple reasons why this line from Genesis struck me. I am going to begin with my second reason before sharing with you my first reason. The second reason why this line from Genesis caught my attention is because the idea of following God into the unknown feels like what we are going through right now with the coronavirus outbreak. We have seen primary, secondary and even college classes canceled in the hopes of continuing their studies online. We have seen businesses like Microsoft tell their employees to work from home. We have seen people stocking up at the stores, and hoarding toilet paper of all things. It certainly does feel like we are following the Lord into the unknown right now.

Even here at St. Teresa of Calcutta, we were given a wise recommendation from the Archdiocese that suggested we postpone all our gatherings with the exception of Mass of course for the time being. And during the Mass, the Archdiocese has wisely recommended the protocols we already put in place last week, removing the water from the font, asking people not to shake hands at the sign of peace, and removing the cup at communion for the time being. We also put hand sanitizer in the pews that you can use as you make your way to communion...we playfully call that the squirt of peace. And we continue to ask people, if you are feeling at all sick, you have a dispensation to please stay home. In addition to what we have been doing, the Archbishop also is asking us to only receive the host at communion on the hand for the time being, something most of us do anyway. Health experts are telling us that all of this is for the best right now and we need to trust them. However, it nevertheless feels like strange times, doesn’t it? It definitely feels like we are following the Lord into a different land for a while.

And, you can imagine what an “ask” it was for God to tell Abram, “Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you.” I think it was Bishop Barron who joked once, “It makes you wonder how many doors the Lord had to knock on before he got someone to say yes.” You see, travel in those days was extremely risky and at times travel could end up being life threatening. Abram, however, was a man of faith. In fact, we call Abraham the father of faith because he said yes to God’s invitation to go forth from his land to an undiscovered country.

This leads me to the first reason why this line from Genesis sparked my interest. Following the Lord to a new land is exactly what Lent is about. This is what the season of Lent is all about. Lent is about following the Lord to a new land that he will show us. It is the destination our upcoming season of Easter will celebrate. It is a world where death does not have the final say, a world that is forever in the presence of the Lord, and a world that never ends. We embarked on this pilgrimage because we are a people of faith. We trust the Lord and we will follow him to the cross itself because we know the story does not end there. Our pilgrimage began with a spirit of repentance along with deeper commitment to prayer, fasting and almsgiving and it is a journey that will lead us to the resurrection and eternal life.

The transfiguration on the mountain as described by St. Matthew in today's Gospel reading therefore foreshadows where our earthly pilgrimage with Jesus is leading us. Everything the ancient Hebrews longed for through the Torah and the Prophets is fulfilled in the person of Jesus. Peter wants to build tents so that they can all stay in that moment, however, Jesus makes it clear that their journey must go on. Like Peter, James and John, we are offered glimpses of God's glory in our lives at times but we cannot stay on those mountain tops as long as we would like either. Like Abram, we are challenged at times to pick up our walking stick and travel to the land that the Lord will show us. We call that faith. For Peter, James and John, the journey after the transfiguration led them to the foot of the cross and the glory of the resurrection. What they saw with their eyes, we are called to believe in faith. You see, the transfiguration of Jesus this weekend offers us a glimpse of our destination.

I find this all very consoling as we make our pilgrimage through Lent this year simply because we are truly journeying with Jesus into some uncharted territory given everything that is going on. However, as a people of faith, we make that journey together without fear and in total trust in the Lord come what may. As we make this journey we can ask ourselves along the way, what are the areas in our lives that need the grace of transfiguration right now? We are encouraged by the words of St. Paul to Timothy in this regard, "Beloved: bear your share of hardship for the Gospel with the strength that comes from God. He saved us and called us to a holy life, not according to our works, but according to his own design and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began..." Think about that. St. Paul says God has been working on this since before time began. This means God has been planning our salvation for a very long time. And so, here we are at the Second Sunday of Lent. No matter what the future holds, with hearts filled with faith, hope and love, we continue our Lenten pilgrimage to that land God will show us through Christ our Lord. Amen.