

Second Sunday in Lent  
February 25, 2018  
Fr. Rick Lorenz

## Reflection

In today's Gospel, we hear that "Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'" Three dwellings. The quantity of three recurs a few times. Jesus took three disciples with him up the mountain: "Peter and James and John." Three persons spoke on the mountain, in glorious bodies foreshadowing the Resurrection: Elijah and Moses and Jesus. They represent the prophets and the law, with the priest who fulfills them through the sacrifice of himself. The three persons of the Trinity were present as well. St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that "The whole Trinity appeared: the Father in the voice, the Son in the man, and the Spirit in the shining cloud (ST III.45.4ad2 qtd. in CCC 555)."

Three dwellings. We can divide our lives into three phases: before our conversion, after our conversion deepens, and once our conversion is complete - when we behold the face of God in heaven.

The first dwelling, the period before conversion, is marked by a certain acceptance of sin. Even if we're nourished by sacramental grace that limits our fall, there remains a preference for the world. Apparent pleasures captivate our emotions, and pull us away from embracing the truth. Then we're like the people of Israel, freed from Egypt and walking towards Mt. Sinai.

Gen 22: 1-2, 9A, 10-13, 15-18  
Ps 116  
Rom 8:31B-34  
Mk 9:2-10

The sound of silver and gold clinking in our pockets reminds us of the leeks and onions masking servitude left behind. We look back in longing as the mountain before us rises steeply forbidding. What will God ask of us if we open ourselves to do his will? He said to Abraham, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you." Probably not. But which of our loves will he ask us to give up? Abraham "bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood." Before our conversion, we might have been tied to an altar of wickedness, before a false God of disordered attachment, awaiting the fatal stab of the wages of sin. Did we have the strength to cut the bonds that tie us down? Do we? Will we?

The answer is "no". We cannot redeem ourselves. We're saved by God and what he gives us. Paul told the Romans, "If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not, with him, also give us everything else?" Countless hidden graces, the ministry of the Church, blessings beyond our ken; the prayers of angels and saints, the intercession of Jesus Christ himself seated at the right hand of God: all of these save us. Just as he led the disciples up the mountain, he calls our spirits forth, extending upwards toward him;

stumbling and gasping, stretching and reaching. “O Lord, I am your servant. You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord.” In this second dwelling, Jesus, a familiar figure of all our days, is suddenly revealed, transfigured and dazzling white. This moment of deepened conversion is a treasure and a consolation. “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here.” The second dwelling. It’s hard to come down from that mountain.

But grace comes into our life for a purpose greater than ourselves. At the confirmations yesterday, the Archbishop reminded us of our mandate: to raise up the next generation of missionary disciples. “By your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.” We descend from the mountain’s glimpse of Jesus as he is, to help bring others to the same vision...and it’s hard. So many responsibilities pull on us, time is short, the task is great. It’s Stewardship Sunday, and this gives us an opportunity: to give our talents to the Church through ministry. Everything that happens here is a ministry. We’re inspired by the saints who gave much and the martyrs who gave all. Against our objections, we can answer with Paul, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution...?” The saints received much, and gave all, but then received even more.

And this brings us to the third phase our life, the third dwelling. When conversion is complete; when forgiveness and mercy and love dispel attachment; when we’re made whole in holiness with a vision of God unveiled: only then we will know the impact of ministries given and received. Until then we persevere in our efforts, carrying others through our ministry, and being carried in turn by Christ.