

HOMILY for 2nd SUNDAY of LENT – Year C

This Sunday's Gospel tells us about the special encounter of the three disciples with God the Father & other holy figures in their Jewish tradition. As I reflect on that story, I'm reminded of this cute story I'd like to share with you.

Mother Teresa died & went to Heaven. God met her & asked if she was hungry. Mother Teresa said, "I could use some snacks," so God opens a can of tuna & some rye bread & they share it. (It must be Lenten Friday up there that day!).

As she ate, Mother Teresa looked down into Hell & saw the people there eating huge steaks, lobsters, expensive wine, & flaming desert. Mother Teresa said, "I'm really glad to be in Heaven, God. But, why do we just eat tuna & rye bread while down there in Hell they're eating like kings?"

God answered, "Well dear, for just two people, why bother to cook?"

Anyway, last Sunday, I talked with you about the defining moment that Jesus had to face before embarking on His suffering & death on the Cross. As He contemplated on that difficult decision & tried to prepare for it, Jesus encountered the Devil & all of its temptations. If we have not believed in the presence of the Devil after seeing all the evil acts happening in our world, we must do now after reflecting on last Sunday's Gospel. But, as you might know, whenever we see the presence of the Devil, we'd find the mighty power of God & His abundant blessings for us. That's what this Sunday's readings want to tell us about. So, if last Sunday we heard how the Devil tried to tempt Jesus & deter Him from going through with His mission of salvation, this Sunday we'll be reminded about the constant presence of God with God's people & Jesus' commitment to that important mission.

In today's First Reading, we learned that God took Abraham outside & said: "Look up at the sky & count the stars, if you can. Just so shall your descendants be... I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as a possession." God then added, "...To your descendants I give this land from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River (the Euphrates)." So, the Lord first promised to Abraham that his descendants will multiply & be as many as the stars in the sky. With that promise, the Lord wanted Abraham to know that He'd be with him & continue to bless His family for many generations to come. When Abraham sees his numerous children & grandchildren, he'd realize that the Lord is always with him & his family. In case Abraham might not see God's presence in that blessing, the Lord added another blessing by letting his descendants have the possession of the Promised Land. Abraham might not possess that land right then. But, as long as his descendants continue to keep their hope for it alive, the Lord would always be with them & help them achieve that dream sooner or later. Indeed, the presence of God with the people of God is alive & well if they continue to dream about the Promised Land.

Meanwhile, today's Gospel helps us see how the early disciples found God's presence as they prepared themselves for the death & departure of their master. Jesus evidently took three of His disciples – Peter, John, & James – up a mountain to pray & prepare for His upcoming death & passion. Their goal might be to spend some time alone together in prayer. But, what they did not expect was the surprised revelation of God the Father & other holy figures. Here's how this Sunday's Gospel shares with us about that extraordinary experience: "...While He [Jesus] was praying, His face changed in appearance & His clothes became dazzling white.

Suddenly, two men were talking with Him – Moses & Elijah. They appeared in glory & spoke of His passage which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem.” It continues, “...When these were leaving, Peter said to Jesus, ‘Master, how good it is for us to be here. Let us set up three booths, one for you, one for Moses, & one for Elijah.’...While he was speaking, a cloud came & overshadowed them, & the disciples grew fearful as others entered it. Then from the cloud came a voice which said, ‘This is my Son, my chosen one. Listen to Him.’” So, the three disciples were able to see God the Father & two holiest figures in their Jewish tradition. That experience made them feel like they were in Heaven; & Peter wanted to build a permanent home right there to make it last forever. They surely wanted nothing more than being in the presence of God & their master every day. All of us here would surely want that same experience of being in the presence of God forever.

We know that our lives are full of challenges & unexpected things. Those experiences might make us feel anxious & overwhelmed sometimes. That’s why we need to be in the presence of God & ask God to help us every day. For we cannot handle our life challenges all by ourselves. Moreover, we learned from last Sunday’s Gospel that the Devil cannot stop tempting us & pulling us away from God & the right path. We were told how it tried to tempt even Jesus on different things of this world. If the Devil dared to do that to the Son of God, we can be sure that it will not leave us alone or let us be free from its bad influences. So, we need to be near God at all time & ask God to give us protection & help every day. With God by our side, we’ll be able to resist the Devil’s temptations & stay on the right path to Heaven. God will give us strength & courage to deal with our daily challenges. God will bring us comfort when we face tumultuous time & hope when we feel down. When God is with us, we have nothing to fear or worry about; & we can continue our assigned mission. That’s how Jesus & the three disciples felt after they met God on the mountain.

My dear brothers & sisters, Jesus is facing a tough road leading to His death on the Cross for our salvation. But, that road would bring us life & lots of wonderful blessings beyond this life. Because of the encouragement of God the Father today, He was able to resist the Devil’s temptations & complete that tough road for us. Likewise, if we’re able to meet God this Lent, we’ll be able to overcome some of our bad habits & make it a little closer to Heaven. We’ll be able to conquer our challenges & journey of the Cross in this life. To give us encouragement to focus on that mission these forty days of Lent, let me leave with you these words of wisdom from Paul in today’s Second Reading, “...We have our citizenship in Heaven; it is from there that we eagerly await the coming of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will give a new form to this lowly body of ours & remake it according to the pattern of His glorified body.” If we keep that goal in mind, we’ll be able to complete our Lenten journey with Jesus & look forward to His resurrection at Easter time.