

Homily for the 2nd Sunday in Lent

March 16-17, 2019

Readings: Genesis 15:5-12, 7-8; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 9:28b-36

Preacher: Jeanne Mooney

That moment we recognize that God stays with us, changes us. Prayer helps us to discern God's presence and be transformed by the encounter, even if we don't realize right away that God is with us.

In this week's reading from Genesis, God promises Abram that his descendants would be numbered as the stars. Abram, placing his faith in God, still wants reassurance that he will receive the land God promised to him. He asks, "How am I to know that I shall possess it?" Abram faithfully enacts a rite as God directs. He experiences a trance and a "deep, terrifying darkness." Afterwards, he receives a sign: a "smoking fire pot and a flaming torch" appear in the midst of the animal carcasses he had prepared for the rite. God affirms the covenant with Abram, to give him "this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River, the Euphrates." Abram's participation in the rite confirms his faith and clarifies God's promise.

Luke's gospel makes clear that Jesus made time to pray throughout his ministry. On one of these occasions, Peter, James, and John accompany him up the mountain and experience his divine presence in the Transfiguration. The disciples were dozing, but became "fully awake" when they saw Jesus' glory. They didn't know what to make of what they were seeing. Peter started talking, but "did not know what he was saying." A cloud came over the three disciples and they were frightened. A voice spoke, identifying Jesus as God's Son. The experience deeply affected the disciples, and Luke tells us, "they fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen." They needed time and silence to process their encounter with the presence of God.

Sometimes we also need to give ourselves the gift of time to realize the presence of God in our lives. In the beginning of Lent, our parish's Candidates and Catechumen experienced the Examen, the Ignatian practice of reflecting on one's day to notice where God was present. We were

instructed to breathe deeply, relax, and ask God to be with us as we prayed. Our prayer guide wryly commented that a few times during her daily examen, she relaxed to the point of falling asleep—much like Peter, James, and John in Luke’s gospel. As we prayed, we asked God to be with us, thought of something to be grateful for in our day, and noticed where God was in the people and events in our day. After the prayer, one of our group commented that before praying the examen, she thought her day had been frustrating and unproductive. Seeing God’s presence in her day changed her perspective: God had been with her the entire time.

Although I didn’t notice right away, God was present in the people attending our parish Ash Wednesday Masses. Moms held babies and grasped the hands of young children. Young people wore gear emblazoned with the name of their team or school. A man walked slowly, leaning on a cane. A woman held the arm of her elderly mother. As each person came forward, I pressed my thumb into the small bowl of ashes, attempted to trace a cross on their foreheads, and reminded them to “Repent, and believe in the Gospel.” Looking back at the day, I realized that I became aware of God’s presence through the witness of all those receiving ashes. Life can be hectic. Events in our country and in our world may horrify, anger, or sadden us. Yet we still come to be marked with a reminder to turn our minds and hearts to God.

During this season of Lent, may the practices of fasting, almsgiving, and prayer help us discern the presence of God. Moment by moment, may we be transformed by God’s presence in the people, places, and events in our lives.