

Second Sunday of Lent B/2012

The readings of this second Sunday of Lent talk about the importance of faith in God. They invite us to understand that the commitment of our faith requires that we make a choice in favor of God, whatever might be the cost and the sufferings we can endure.

The first reading recalls the trial of Abraham and the difficult choice he made in accepting to sacrifice his son, Isaac, at the request of God. In fact, when God asked Abraham to sacrifice his beloved and only son, he did not hesitate to do so. But as he showed his faith, God spared Isaac and declared Abraham a righteous one because of his obedience and faithfulness. As a consequence, God promised to bless not only his descendant by giving them a land, but also the whole of the human race.

What is behind this text is the idea that faith in God is demanding. However, if we remain faithful to God and accept the sacrifice his love imposes on us, he will reward us. Another idea is that all those who, in turmoil and time of difficulty, do not renounce their faith and fidelity, God builds for them a bright future.

All that helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus is transfigured on the mountain. First of all, the Gospel says that Jesus went with some of his disciples up the mountain where he was transfigured. During the transfiguration, everything of him was completely transformed, from his face to his clothes.

At the same time, two important personalities of Jewish history, namely Elijah and Moses, appeared conversing with him; while Peter, overwhelmed by the scene, wanted to build three tents in order to keep the spectacle ongoing. At that particular moment, a cloud covered them all and a voice from heaven recognized Jesus as a beloved son to whom they had to listen.

In the end, as the incident was over, they went down the mountain and Jesus prohibited them to tell anyone what they saw until he had risen from the dead. The disciples, in turn, kept the secret even if they did not understand at that time what all that meant.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing we learn is about the paradox of Jesus' suffering. The Gospel says that Jesus, who was used to going up the mountain to pray alone, this time, takes with him Peter, James and John.

Why did he do so? The reason is that he wanted them to be the witnesses of what would happen to him on the top of the mountain. In fact, before the transfiguration, Jesus had just announced his passion and death. As it often happens with those we love when they get sick, the disciples could not accept such an idea.

In order to comfort the disciples, Jesus takes some of them up the mountain so that they may realize with their own eyes that even if he had to pass through suffering and death, he is prepared for great glory. Therefore, in turn, they too have to pass through suffering for his sake in order to share in his glory.

This episode sheds light on our suffering and its outcome. Through the transfiguration of Jesus, we have the assurance that after much pain and suffering spent on earth, we will one day share in the joy of Jesus. Our mortal body will be similar to his in the glory of heaven. Therefore, we are not suffering for nothing; we are not running for nothing, but

for an important goal, namely to share one day in the joy of the resurrection, which is already anticipated in the transfiguration of Jesus.

Then, we understand why St Paul says that nobody can bring a charge against the chosen of the Lord and no one can be against them. It is for the same reason that Abraham did not hesitate to sacrifice Isaac, knowing well in his heart that God was capable of giving him more than a son.

The second thing we learn is about the fullness of revelation. In fact, people talk very often about the presence of God in other religions, like Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism, etc. I certainly do not deny what the good God can do in many religions and many people in the world. That is his secret I cannot pierce with my mortal and poor mind.

But, at the reading of today's Gospel, there is a question I cannot avoid: "Why on earth would Jesus be conversing with Moses and Elijah" in such a crucial moment of his life? The answer seems very simple when we recall the identity of Moses and Elijah. In fact, Moses is the founding father of Israel as a nation, because it was he who gave them the Law that is seen as their constitution. Elijah is the greatest of all the prophets of Israel.

If, then, Elijah and Moses, are speaking with Jesus, it is in order to show that in him are united the Law and the prophets. Therefore, Jesus is in the true line of those great personalities of the history of Israel. He is the fulfillment of everything they stand for. In him is the full revelation of what God wanted to communicate to the world. In this context, we understand why the voice from heaven could just declare that he is "my beloved son".

The last thing we learn is about the good fortune of listening to Jesus. In the word listening, I see three things: paying attention, being open and accepting. When the Father is asking us to listen to Jesus, he is recommending us to pay attention to what Jesus is telling us, to be open to his message and to accept the direction of life he gives us.

This is our duty as Christians and this is our good fortune to have someone to listen to like Jesus. This duty is very important, because we live in society and in a culture where there are many voices to listen to and many things to pay attention to. We have to be careful not to equate the teaching of Jesus with other teachings or to put the word of Jesus at the same level with other words we are used to listening to. Jesus should have a particular place and role in our lives.

I strongly believe that this is one of the challenges of Lent, namely to be able to listen to Jesus. That is why, the transfiguration reminds us that we have to choose Christ, whatever might be the cost. However, whatever might be our suffering, we are sure to share in the joy of Jesus. May this Lent be an opportunity to do just that! May God bless you all!

Genesis 22: 1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18; Romans 8: 31b-34; Mark 9: 2-10



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