

2nd Sunday of Lent - C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18

In today's first reading we hear of God's first covenant with Abram. In Genesis 12:1-2, God had made a three-fold promise of blessing to Abram: nationhood, dynasty (name), and worldwide blessing. These promises were then secured by covenants.

Abram was called at the age of seventy-five when the Lord told him "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). Abram obediently set out with Sari his wife, Lot his nephew, and all the possessions and servants (slaves) they had acquired and went to Canaan. Canaan was occupied by the descendants of Canaan the son of Ham (who was one of the three sons of Noah) and brother of Cush, Egypt, and Put. Canaan was cursed by Noah because of his (Canaan's) father's actions when he discovered Noah drunk in his tent (Genesis 9:25). Because of the curse, the Canaanites were thought to be subject people of the Semites (descendants of Shem, the firstborn of the three sons of Noah). After living in Canaan, Abram fled to Egypt to escape the famine in Canaan. While in Egypt Abram passed Sari off as his sister and she was incorporated into Pharaoh's harem. Because of this, God inflicted serious diseases upon Pharaoh and his household. Pharaoh then learned of the deception and expelled Abram and Sari and all their possessions.

Abram and Lot then separated and Lot went to live near Sodom while Abram returned to Canaan. Four kings defeated five kings (an indication of their power) and took Lot prisoner. Upon hearing of Lot's capture, Abram took his 318 trained men and defeated the four kings who had defeated the five kings.

When he returned, he was blessed by Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of God Most High. Hebrew tradition has it that Melchizedek was Shem. If this was the case, the blessing was the blessing of the firstborn son of Noah; the same blessing which was later fought over by Esau and Jacob.

This brings us up to the time of our reading today, some 10-11 years after Abram started on his journey. Abram (the name means "father who is exalted") and Sari remain childless although God had promised him the first time he arrived in Canaan that He would give the land to his offspring. Abram has despaired to God that he has no offspring and that his servant will inherit his estate. God now makes His promise into a covenant.

⁵ He took him outside and said: "Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so," he added, "shall your descendants be."

Abram will have descendants too numerous to count.

⁶ Abram put his faith in the LORD,

Accepted God's plan with assurance – even though realization of it seems unlikely. After all, Abram is 85-86 years old and Sari herself is no spring chicken.

who credited it to him as an act of righteousness.

Many fundamentalists point to this as proof of justification by faith, not works. Abram's actions 10-11 years earlier shows obedience (works) long before any declaration of faith. Justification is not a legal declaration, but sonship. The justified must live the obedient life of a son.

⁷ He then said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as a possession."

This is the same formula is used in Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6; Leviticus 25:38, where it refers to the bringing out of Egypt. God did the bringing, Abram acted in obedience.

⁸ "O Lord GOD," he asked, "How am I to know that I shall possess it?"⁹ He brought him all these, split them in two, and placed each half opposite the other; but the birds he did not cut up.

From Jeremiah 34:18, we know that the covenanting parties passed between the parts, showing their willingness to share the fate of the animals should they disobey the terms of the covenant.

¹¹ Birds of prey swooped down on the carcasses, but Abram stayed with them.

Symbols of the dangers that will threaten the covenant. Abram defends the covenant by chasing them away.

¹² As the sun was about to set, a trance fell upon Abram, and a deep, terrifying darkness enveloped him.

A sign of divine intervention. Adam was also in a deep sleep when Eve was created (Genesis 2:21).

¹⁷ When the sun had set and it was dark, there appeared a smoking brazier and a flaming torch,

God's divine presence. Recall that God appeared to Moses as a flame at the burning bush; to the Jews during the exodus as a pillar of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night.

which passed between those pieces.

The ritual act of swearing the covenant. God takes the part of both parties signifying that man is not strong enough to hold up his end of the covenant without divine help.

¹⁸ It was on that occasion that the LORD made a covenant with Abram,

A family bond. Not a promise or contract, something much more important and binding. Cannot be canceled or annulled.

saying: “To your descendants I give this land,

Assures later Israel of the possession of the land. The Israelites cannot be a nation if they do not possess the land. This secures the first promise to Abram in Genesis 12:2. This covenant was fulfilled in Moses who brought the twelve tribes to the promised land.

from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River (the Euphrates).”

The borders were traditional in Solomon’s time (1 Kings 4:21). Israel today bases their claim on this passage showing right to title.

2nd Reading - Philippians 3:17-4:1

Our epistle reading today comes from Paul’s warning against false teachers. The adversaries would seem to be Judaizers – itinerant preachers, who in the name of a higher perfection seek to impose upon Gentile converts the Levitical practices which were outdated (abrogated) by the new covenant; the covenant by which we were made children of God and were no longer His slaves.

^{3:17} Join with others in being imitators of me, brothers [and sisters],

Paul doesn’t hesitate to propose himself for imitation since he himself is an imitator of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

and observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us.

Stick to the teachings of the Church and follow those who adhere to them. Do not look for easier and/or what appears to be more realistic teachings.

¹⁸ For many, as I have often told you and now tell you even in tears, conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ.

When the false teachers teach something different than the Church, they deny the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. If it were not for the sacrifice there would be no new covenant nor would there be the family meal to eat which makes us a party to the covenant and a member of God’s family.

¹⁹ Their end is destruction.

When the end times come, these people will be ruined; cast forever from heaven.

Their God is their stomach;

This is either a reference to Jewish dietary laws or a concern for keeping themselves well fed. Recall that when Jesus sent out the 70 (some translations say 72) they were to take nothing with them as they traveled but were to depend daily upon those to whom they ministered.

their glory is in their “shame.”

To boast of circumcision is to glory in something which one otherwise modestly covers.

Their minds are occupied with earthly things.

All the Levitical rules belonging to the old covenant are now superseded by Christ. To adopt Jewish practices is not outright paganism but regard for such practices would be the equivalent of a reversion to reverence for the elemental spirits.

²⁰ **But our citizenship is in heaven,**

We are sons of God, co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17).

and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The parousia (Acts 1:11; 3:21).

²¹ **He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body**

The bodies of Christians, now partaking in the morality of present life cannot enter the final glory without transformation (see 1 Corinthians 15:50). The risen Christ is the example as well as the agent of the true humanity God intended for human beings from the start (Romans 8:19-21).

“When we rise and are changed and are made spiritual in soul, body and spirit (for all these three make up one man and are one spirit), the body in which we have been humbled will be raised. It will be of the same and equal form to the body of Christ’s own glory. So too we shall be spirits as he himself is a spirit.” [Marius Victorinus (ca. A.D. 355), *Epistle to the Philippians* 3,21]

by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself.

See Psalm 8:6 (8:7 in The New American Bible) the messianic reign of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:25-28).

^{4:1} **Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, beloved.**

Do not be seduced away from the new existence now enjoyed “in the Lord.”

Gospel - Luke 9:28b-36

The story we hear today we will hear again on August 6th, the Transfiguration of Christ. The time is about one year prior to Jesus' death and resurrection. He has fed the five thousand, fed the four thousand, walked on water, delivered His bread of life discourse, and Peter has made his revelation at Caesarea Philippi "You are the Christ." Jesus has just bestowed upon Peter the name of Rock (*kepha*), promised to build His church upon this rock, and given Peter the ability to bind and loose. About eight days after this, today's reading occurs.

^{28b} [Jesus] took Peter, John, and James

The inner circle of disciples. Peter is always listed first, showing primacy.

and went up the mountain to pray.

This account is structured to show a parallel with Moses who went up Mount Sinai to talk with God (burning bush) and to receive the ten commandments. Why did He take the three disciples with Him? A life and death moment requires two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6).

²⁹ While he was praying

Often in Luke Jesus is portrayed at prayer before an important decision: election of the twelve (6:12); Peter's revelation (9:18); instruction on prayer (11:1), the agony in the garden (22:41); and on the cross (23:46).

his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white.

The various translations of the Bible give an interesting description: "white and glistening" (King James Version); "bright as a flash of lightning" (New International Version); "sparkling white" (New Jerusalem Bible). See also Mark 9:3.

³⁰ And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah,

Two witnesses from the old covenant: Moses represents the Law and Elijah represents the prophets. The Old Testament scriptures are fully represented. Elijah is to herald the coming of the Messiah [Malachi 4:5 (3:23 in The New American Bible and New Jerusalem Bible)].

³¹ who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.

Saint Luke is the only one of the Gospel writers to tell us what Jesus, Moses and Elijah were discussing – Jesus' mission to go to Jerusalem and be crucified, then spend 40 days on earth before ascending.

³² Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep,

Moses and Elijah had come to speak to Jesus only.

but becoming fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. ³³ As they

were about to part from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

Peter is not anxious for this to end. A reference to the feast of tabernacles (see Zechariah 14:16).

But he did not know what he was saying. ³⁴ While he was still speaking, a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud.

The cloud is a symbol of God’s presence.

³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my chosen Son; listen to him.”

This is the central point of this reading. Moses and Elijah (representatives of the old covenant) have left and Jesus remains to institute the new covenant. Just like Mary said at the wedding feast at Cana, “Do whatever He tells you.” See also Hebrews 1:1-2.

³⁶ After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. They fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen.