

The 2nd Sunday of Lent

(Genesis 15:5-18; Phil 3:17-4:1; Luke 9:28-36)

Last week, I was having a discussion with 2 co-workers at Cornell about why bad things happen to good people, and (if there is a God) why does God allow such things to happen? We talked about freewill and sin and sickness and death. In the end, I was asked “why do you believe that God is involved in your life?” I was going to answer that I had faith, but instead I said: “I have hope”. Later, when I came home, my wife told me about the bad day that she had. She then showed me a Scripture passage which she found that day and which gave her reassurance. It is from the Book of Joshua (1:9) “Be Strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” So, when I sat down this past week to go over the Readings for Mass, I saw where God was leading me. “Ahh,” I said, “you want me to talk about hope!”

The Catechism defines hope as the virtue “by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.” (1813) "

As St. Paul says in our Second Reading today: “He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself”.

Paul is talking about hope.

Paul and the Apostles and early Disciples all had hope. They hoped for the coming of God’s Kingdom and the return of Jesus. They hoped for the Resurrection and for life everlasting. That hope sustained them in their trials, in their loneliness, and in their community.

Abraham, in our first reading, is a true model for hope. God has promised him that his descendants will be countless, but Abraham and his wife were old and childless. Yet, Abraham had faith and lifted up by his hope, he was able to keep that faith even when

things seemed impossible. “Hoping against hope, he believed, and thus became the father of many nations (Catechism, 1819).

Jesus tried to give his disciples hope in the Transfiguration. They saw Jesus Godlike in his Glory. They saw Moses and Elijah with him. They heard God speak. It was meant to fill them with hope. To sustain them in the trials ahead in Jerusalem, but they were human. We know of their failures, but Jesus appeared to them again on Easter Sunday and for 40 days after to re-instill in them the hope that they would need to carry out God’s will in our world. Like Joshua they needed to be “strong and courageous ... not...frightened or dismayed...” As Jesus told them “I am with you always even unto the end of time.”

St. Paul writes in his Letter to the Romans that God keeps us in the "hope that does not disappoint." (Rom 5:5) Paul also writes in Romans : "Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation." (Rom 5:10). Hope is expressed and nourished in prayer. Spiritual Writer, Henri Nouwen in his book “The Only Necessary Thing” writes “(p)rayer as a hopeful and joyful waiting for God is a

really...superhuman task unless we realize that we do not have to wait alone. In the community of faith we can find...the support to sustain and deepen our prayer, and we are enabled to constantly look forward beyond our immediate and often narrowing private needs(p. 123)”

So, hope is nurtured by Community and by our shared faith. We are a community of faith, so therefore, we are a community of hope and that hope can allow us to be a shining light to the greater community around us.

If you read the Bulletin this week (hopefully NOT during Mass!), you will find a short article by me about Dante Alighieri “Divine Comedy”. The “Divine Comedy” is an epic poem written in the 14th Century that consists of 3 parts: “The Inferno”, “Purgatory” and “Paradise”. It tells the story of an imaginary journey that Dante takes to Hell, Purgatory and Heaven. In Dante’s version of Hell, the Gates of Hell have inscribed the words “Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.”

Now, you may look at that as fanciful, but Dante actually touches on a very important theological premise, and that is: “existence without God, is existence without hope!”

Those in Hell have no hope for two reasons: they are isolated by their own selfishness and they have abandoned God. That is a key point: God did not abandon them, they chose to reject God, and in doing so they have rejected hope.

In the midst of our own pain and suffering, our heartbreaks and trials, it may be hard to for us to have hope. When that does happen, try and remember Joshua (1:9) in the Bible. If you get a chance today, go home open you Bible and write these words down on a piece of paper and keep it with you:

“Be Strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”