

2nd Sunday of Lent, Year A (March 8th, 2020)

Genesis 12:1-4a

God originally called Abram, his father Terah, his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot out of Ur, a town about 70 miles south of present day Baghdad. This was the Las Vegas of the ancient world, a city known for its prosperity, and Abram himself was a rich man.⁷ They followed the Euphrates River for about 600 miles to Haran in southeastern Turkey,¹⁷ where they settled until Terah, Abram's father, died. (Gen. 11:32) Then God spoke to Abram the words of today's scripture.

1The Lord said to Abram: Note that the initiative is God's.¹⁶ When God's initial call came to Abram, he was 75 years old.² God changed his name to Abraham much later when he was 99 years old.⁵ **“Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house** This divine calling involves a break with the idolatrous cult followed by Abram's family so as to worship the true God.⁴ In both Ur and Haran the people worshiped the moon god Nannar and other astral deities.⁸ **to a land that I will show you.** God eventually leads him to Canaan but when the call is given, no destination is revealed. Abram is simply called to follow God in trust.² It is as though God is saying: “IF YOU will leave the land of your kinsfolk and your father's house and go to the land of my choosing, I WILL fulfill the sevenfold promises which follow: 1. I will make of you a great nation, 2. I will bless you, 3. I will make your name great, 4. you will be a blessing, 5. I will bless those who bless you, 6. I will curse those who curse you and 7. all the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you!

2I will make of you a great nation, This is a promise that Abram will have offspring even though his wife is old and barren! This promise is upgraded to a covenant in Gen 15 and is fulfilled in Moses.¹⁶ **and I will bless you; I will make your name great,** This promise is upgraded to a covenant in Gen 17:1-19 and fulfilled in David.¹⁶ **so that you will be a blessing.** A common saying among the Jews was: “May you be as blessed as Abraham!”⁶

3I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. **All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you.”** This promise was upgraded to a covenant in Gen 22 and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.¹⁶ We can also note that Abraham is father to Jews, Christians and Muslims, another way in which many of the families of the earth find blessing in him.⁵

4aAbram went as the Lord directed him. God did fulfill his promise and so we are still reading about Abram some 4000 years after these events took place.¹ Abram took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all of the animals and hired or purchased workers (perhaps 200 people in all)⁷ they had acquired in Haran. It was about 400 miles to Shechem in the center of Canaan and would have taken them about a month if they had traveled 15 miles a day on foot.⁸ Every baptized person is called to be a “blessing” and to bless. Hence lay people may preside at certain blessings (children, spouse, home, food, etc.) but the more a blessing concerns the church and sacramental life, the more is its administration reserved to the ordained ministry.³ (CCC 1669)

Paul, in prison, writes this letter to Timothy in Ephesus in hopes of encouraging him to persevere in his ministry. There was much persecution going on in the Christian communities. Paul was concerned because of Timothy's youth and the amount of opposition to him as a leader. Paul was urging him to be bold.¹⁰ This letter was written between 63-67 AD and Timothy did persevere for we find him as the Bishop of Ephesus when he was martyred in 97 AD.

2 Timothy 1:8b-10

*The first part of verse 8 sets the stage: “So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for his sake; but bear your share...”*²

8bBeloved: Bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God. Paul reminds Timothy and us that we can bear the suffering because God gives us the strength.²

9He saved us and called us to a holy life, The Catechism makes it clear that this call is not just for Bishops but that ALL are called to holiness, that is, to intimate union with Christ and the way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle. We learn how to live this holy life from the example of authentic witnesses who live it.³ (CCC 2013, 2015) **not according to our works** We can not “earn our way” to heaven, but good works, done for the love of God, are necessary.¹⁶ **but according to his own design and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began,** Four essential aspects of salvation are identified: 1. God has already accomplished salvation for everyone; 2. it is God who calls all men to avail themselves of it; 3. it is entirely a gift and 4. God’s plan is an eternal one.⁹ Before the world was, God was; and he knew then what would be required.¹⁶

10but now made manifest through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus, This refers in the first place to his incarnation, but it includes his entire work of redemption which culminates in his appearing in glory and majesty.⁹ **who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light** The Redemption has two wonderful effects —victory over death (physical and spiritual) and the gift of everlasting life.⁹ This truth is expressed in the Memorial Acclamation: “Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life. Lord Jesus, come in Glory.” **through the gospel.** Pope John Paul II in his encyclical letter, *On the Christian Meaning of Suffering*, said, “In the cross of Christ not only is the Redemption accomplished through suffering, but also human suffering itself has been redeemed.”¹

Matthew 17:1-9

This scene at the Transfiguration is now the fourth Luminous Mystery of the Rosary. Realizing that his Death will demoralize his disciples, Jesus forewarns them and strengthens their faith. He wants them to glimpse the glory and majesty with which his holy human nature will be endowed in heaven.¹⁵ Matthew’s gospel is intent on revealing Jesus as the “New Moses,” the leader who will bring God’s people out of exile once and for all.⁵

1Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, Moses was instructed to take three priests (Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu) of the Old Law with him onto Sinai, so Jesus takes Peter, James, and John — priests of the New Covenant — with him onto Tabor.¹ **and led them up a high mountain** Mt. Tabor has been spoken of as a second Mt. Sinai. Matthew presents Jesus as a new Moses.¹ There are also other similarities between the two events: Both take place on the 7th day, the faces of both Jesus and Moses shine with God’s glory. Both events involve the glory cloud of God’s presence and both involve God speaking with a heavenly voice.¹² **by themselves.**

2And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. Jesus is not an object reflecting light from any other source; rather, light is flowing directly from him and out of him. The divine nature dwelling in the humanity of Jesus is made recognizable. This is how Jesus will appear at the Resurrection and at the Second Coming.¹⁴

3And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them conversing with him. This would seem to suggest an endorsement of Jesus by the Law, represented by Moses, and the prophets, represented by

Elijah. These are two figures in the Old Testament who spoke directly with God and in both cases it was on a high mountain.¹

4Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” In an outburst of his typical generosity, Peter volunteers to house Jesus and his heavenly guests; but what he is really trying to do is catch the ecstasy and house the glory and beauty of God that are pouring down over them. He wants the experience to last.¹⁴ This liturgical feast became an early Church symbol of the ongoing joys of heaven.¹⁵

5While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud The luminous cloud is the Shekinah, the symbol of the presence of God. In a cloud God comes to declare the Law to Moses and he speaks from the cloud as he does here.¹¹ cast a shadow over them, There is also a connection between this event and the Jewish Feast of Booths. First there is the matter of Peter suggesting that he build three booths. Then too, that feast also came to be associated with manifestations of God’s presence in the glory cloud that appeared in the Temple when the Ark of the Covenant was brought to the Mt. Zion Temple by Solomon during the same festival.¹ then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” A similar proclamation was made at Jesus’ baptism. The final statement, “listen to him”, evokes Deut 18:15 where God promised that “A prophet like me (Moses) will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kinsmen; to him you shall listen.”¹²

6When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. This is their reaction to the divine command (“listen to him”) rather than to the vision itself.¹⁶

7But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and do not be afraid.” Jesus acts as a comforter with his presence, his touch and his voice as he tells them not to be afraid.

8And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone. Moses and Elijah have withdrawn; diminished in significance before the fuller revelation in Jesus.¹⁶

9As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, “Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.” Jesus did not want the people to try to crown him as a political Messiah-King who would save them from Rome.¹⁵ In the Eastern Church, anyone who wanted to become a painter of religious subjects started with the Transfiguration because they had to see with the eyes of faith.

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) The Commentary Notes of Tim Gray and Sean Innerst, (2) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1999” by Lawrence E. Mick, (3) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (4) “The Navarre Bible: Pentateuch,” (5) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2002” by Aelred R. Rosser, (6) “Saint Joseph Edition The New American Bible,” (7) “A Father Who Keeps His Promises” by Scott Hahn, (8) “The Story of Stories” by Karen Lee-Thorp, (9) “The Navarre Bible: Thessalonians And Pastoral Epistles,” (10) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (11) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (12) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew, (13) “The Navarre Bible: St. Matthew” (14) “Fire Of Mercy, Heart Of The Word: Meditations On The Gospel According To St. Matthew” by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, (15) “Mystery Of The Kingdom” by Edward P. Sri, (16) The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn, and (17) “Oxford Bible Atlas” edited by Herbert G. May.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.