



Contributed by Father Tim Uniac, C.R.

Father Tim was ordained in 1986. Over the years Father Tim has served in parish ministry as both Assistant Pastor and Pastor. For a number of years he worked full time in youth ministry. He has served his Religious Community as Vocation Director and as Vicar Provincial. He also served his Community internationally as the Vicar General, residing in Rome for six years. Currently he is pastor of St. Francis Parish, Kitchener, Ontario.

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

March 17, 2019

GATHERING TIME

(10-15 Minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

I do not think I am unlike many others who enjoy a good story, a story that is well told and invites us to enter into the story, to become one with the story. I stand today in awe of the scripture stories for this Sunday. Genesis invites me to listen intently to the voice of God, to marvel at the covenant that is now established, to gaze upon the stars of heaven and dare to attempt to count them. I cannot but help recall an experience of the Northern Lights – a breathtaking revelation of God's creation, so awe inspiring that it is difficult to fully describe. The Genesis story today ignites those same feelings of complete and indescribable awe – behold what our God has done! Philippians dares to invite me to behold the cross, an instrument of torture, death and humiliation. Yet the story of the Philippians today is so powerful that it draws my eyes away from the cross, while not forgetting it is there, and invites me to ponder that my citizenship rests in the glory of heaven – me, little old me, there is a place for me in heaven. Then the events of the transfiguration transform me. Imagine being on that mountain top with Jesus, Peter, John and James. Imagine being on that mountain top and seeing Moses and Elijah in all their glory. Imagine being on that mountain and beholding the dazzling white clothes of Jesus, seeing his face transform while in prayer. Imagine being on that mountain as God proclaims Jesus to be His Son. What an amazing story! This is the adventure you are about to experience today, enjoy!

Warm-up Activity *(about 8-10 minutes):*

Today the readings will reveal to us the covenant relationship that exists between us and our God. We will be reminded how God will guide us through this journey of covenant relationship. Saint Paul will remind us that he will guide the Philippians and us through their journey towards heavenly citizenship. Jesus, in his transfiguration, will guide his disciples to the foretaste and revelation of the resurrection. Today the readings take us on an exciting journey of covenant towards heavenly citizenship and the glory of the resurrection. Sit with this in silence for a few moments. Ponder the reality that from the days of Abram in the Book of Genesis, to the days of Paul and the transfiguration of Jesus, God has walked this journey of faith with us, a covenant of countless generations!

The Table of the Word

THEME: SAINT PATRICK

Being of Irish descent I cannot help but boast a little on this day (even if liturgically it is a Sunday). Last year I shared with the people of my parish my thoughts concerning Saint Patrick, here is some of what I said. It is a feast unlike any other in the world, a day when all Catholics think themselves to be Irish, and when all religious denominations wish they were Irish-Catholic. Only the Irish can dare to refer to Patrick as the greatest of saints in the church, while those who are not Irish can only lament they lack Irish blood on this day. It is a day when the Irish excel at the gift of story-telling, the ability to weave into any story the virtues and greatness of the Irish people, perhaps because they have kissed the Blarney Stone. It is a day when the Irish are declared as the saviours of the world (refer to the book: *How the Irish Saved the World*). From Irish whiskey, to Irish stew and soda bread, to Guinness beer, colour photography and some of the greatest literary figures the world has seen, the Irish have done it all. Not to mention some of the more under appreciated inventions of the Irish: underwater hairdryer, the inflatable dart board, or the waterproof teabag. Saint Patrick has inspired it all, has called the Irish to be people of faith and share that with the world. So offer a prayer of thanks this day for the Irish and the blessings they are to the world.

Leader: The Lord Jesus was transfigured and declared as God's Son to whom we are to listen.

Lord Jesus, for the times we have not listened attentively to your voice, **Lord, have mercy.**
Christ Jesus, for the times we have not listened to the proclamation of your word, **Christ, have mercy.**
Lord Jesus, for the times our fear has caused us to not listen to you, **Lord, have mercy.**

Let us pray (together)

*Countless as the stars, O God of Abram,
are the faithful whom you have led into the land of promise.
Dazzling as the snow, O God of Moses and Elijah,
is your glory shining on the face of Jesus, who forever prays on our behalf.
It is good for us to be here! Open our ears and hearts to hear your word;
may your word reveal to us your transfigured glory.
We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering word, and that God is present in the word proclaimed. This is the word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the small Christian community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving.)*

FIRST READING (Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18)

The Lord said to Abram: “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendents be.” And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Then the Lord said to Abram, “I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.” But Abram said, “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?”

The Lord said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” Abram brought the Lord all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendents I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.”

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (Philippians 3:17-4.1)

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the Cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to him.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm, my beloved, in the Lord in this way.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Luke 9:28b-36)

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.

Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to Jesus. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his exodus, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.

Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah,” but Peter did not know what he said.

While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.

And the disciples kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Lectio Divina means “sacred prayer through sacred reading.” It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This word proclaimed today is God's own word, God's way of speaking to you today through God's own Spirit. So take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this word you have just heard to touch you or soak into you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a word or thought that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, simply identify it and describe it in a few words.

COMMENTARY

Genesis. Today an event of great importance to our salvation history unfolds. There is a powerful relationship established in the reading today between God and Abram, a great promise that God makes to Abram: “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them. ... So shall your descendants be.” God gives a promise to Abram and all his descendants that God will be present in their lives forever, a covenant has now been established! What evidence does God offer to Abram to prove that this new covenant relationship has been established? First, and foremost, the descendants of Abram would be countless, more than the stars of heaven. It is important that God asks Abram to “look to the heavens” in order to count the stars – heaven, God, is the source of this blessing of countless descendants. Second, God reminds Abram that he was brought out of Ur. For what purpose? So that God could give to Abram and his descendants the promised land that runs from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates river. And so begins the covenant relationship between us and God, a new journey if you will, where God is our guide.

Philippians. Saint Paul is inviting the community of the Philippians to follow him and the example he sets for them. Paul is promising the Philippians that he will serve as their guide on this journey of standing firm in faith so as to receive their true citizenship in heaven. God in the first reading will serve as guide on the covenant journey; Saint Paul in the second reading will serve as guide on the journey to heavenly citizenship. Saint Paul then makes an interesting point when he calls the Philippians to follow him on this journey even though the cross of Christ may appear to be an embarrassment to them. Paul assures them that because of the cross the Lord will be present with them on this journey to citizenship.

Luke. Jesus and three of his disciples climb up the mountain today, and while at the top the transfiguration of the Lord takes place. This is a timely event in the faith journey of the disciples for it will ultimately serve as an encouragement to them to not lose faith in the days ahead (the passion and death of Christ). There is an important link between the events of the transfiguration and the events of just eight days ago. Eight days previous Jesus fed the great multitude of people with just five loaves of bread and two small fish – and all were satisfied. Jesus was giving example to his disciples concerning the requirements of true discipleship. By showing the disciples the requirements of discipleship Jesus was

revealing to them that this is all part of God's plan. The transfiguration was also a revelation of God's plan – the passion and death of Jesus was to come, making the transfiguration a foretaste of the resurrection. In the midst of confusion amongst the disciples the glory of heaven was being revealed to them on the mountain this day, all part of God's plan.

Allow 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18 *“So shall your descendants be”*

While shocking no doubt, and perhaps even unbelievable on many levels, Abram must surely have been amazed and excited by the promise made by God that his descendants would be countless. This was without question an incredible promise being made by God, even if a small amount of scepticism still remained in the mind of Abram. Abram overcame any doubts he might have had and embraced the covenant that now was established with God. Have you ever been amazed by God while still perhaps a little doubtful? How does the covenant established between God and Abram speak to you?

Philippians 3:17-4:1 *“Our citizenship is in heaven”*

Paul invited the Philippians to not allow fear, darkness, doubt, or even the brutal instrument of death, the cross of Christ, to deter them on their journey to heavenly citizenship. The humiliation Christ endured on the cross will reveal the glory of God. In your own personal moments of fear, darkness and doubt what or who lifted you up to continue your journey to heavenly citizenship? What gave you the greatest hope during these dark moments?

Luke 9:28b-36 *“This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to Him!”*

The moment of transfiguration on the mountain top must have been an amazing experience for the disciples. The disciples, after a long and no doubt tiring day, were asked by Jesus to climb the mountain with him – my goodness, a nap might have been something they would have appreciated more rather than a long trek up the mountain. However, once to the top the transfiguration must have brought the disciples some refreshment as the glory of heaven was revealed to them. So much refreshment that the disciples clearly wanted to stay on the mountain top. Why would Jesus not allow them stay on the mountain following the transfiguration event?

CARING-PRAYING TIME (15-20 minutes)

1. **Word of the Week:** *“On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram”*

2. **Suggestion for the Week:**

The disciples hungered for peace and quiet, an opportunity to spend some time away from the demands of the crowds, the demands of discipleship, and simply rest awhile on the mountain top of the transfiguration. While not a bad thing to want to rest in the Lord, Jesus called his disciples to move ahead and climb down the mountain. Certainly a challenge for the disciples, yet they did what Jesus asked of them. Reflect upon any moments in your life when you would have preferred to rest in the Lord, yet the

demands of life would not afford you this opportunity. How did you feel? How were you able to move forward? Was there any sense of “reward” afterwards? Did you seek out some time to rest in the Lord in other ways?

3. Intercessions: (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

Leader: In the name of Jesus, who was transfigured while at prayer, let us pray now for the needs of all.

That Israel, the land of promise, sacred to the descendents of Abraham and Sarah and to all people of faith, may come forth from the shadows of terror to enjoy a springtime of peace, we pray to the Lord ...

That the despair of those in need may be transfigured into hope by the charity of Christians who have embraced the disciplines of Lent, we pray to the Lord ...

That the elect, preparing for baptism, may listen to the voice of God's chosen One, and be numbered among the descendents promised to Abraham, we pray to the Lord ...

That the sick and home bound may experience the healing power of the Saviour transforming them unto glory, we pray to the Lord ...

That we may leave this place of prayer and study of God's word with new zeal for living according to the example given us by Jesus, we pray to the Lord ...

That by the power of Christ's cross, our beloved departed may come to enjoy the glory of all whose citizenship is in heaven, we pray to the Lord ...

How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray (together)

O Lord, great and faithful God,

to those who seek you with a sincere heart you reveal the splendour of your face.

Continue to strengthen us in our faith through our prayer and study of your word.

Attune our hearts toward true discipleship so that we may be your faithful disciples.

We ask this through Jesus, who is Lord, for ever and ever. Amen.

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one,

OUR FATHER ...

A Ministry of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (Celebrating the Word was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R., deceased 2012). For information: Website: www.resurrectionists.ca E-mail: provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca. The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA)