



Contributed by Father Paul Voisin, C.R.

Father Paul Voisin was ordained in 1977. Father Paul has served the community as a missionary, in parish churches, and as Provincial Superior. He served as Pastor of several parishes in Bermuda from 2008 - 2017. Fr. Paul is presently serving as the Superior General for the Congregation of the Resurrection in Rome for the next 3 years.

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT
February 28, 2021

GATHERING TIME

(10-15 Minutes)

Introduction to the Word:



Perhaps many of us have a favourite photo of ourselves – at a particular occasion, with particular people, or at a particular time in our lives. I have a favourite photo (shown here), that I have always had in my room for almost thirty years. It was taken, on my tripod, after I had arrived in Bolivia. The reason for liking the photo is not that I am thirty-seven years younger and quite a few pounds lighter,

but that it was taken at the highest point of land that I have ever walked on. I went with two members of our Parish team out to our furthest village, Santiago de Collana, about an hour and a half from our Parish Church in La Paz. While they were busy with ministry, I took some time to climb the big hill behind the village. It was higher than I thought, and it probably took me about an hour. When I got there, it was a stupendous sight. On the one side, I looked down past the village to the valley and back up the other side to majestic snow-capped Mount Illimani. From the other side I looked down thousands of feet to the lower valley with its verdant pastures and running river, and then back up the other side to the *altiplano*, the high flat plateau over 14,000 feet above sea level. I was looking ‘down’ (or at least I had the impression) at the *altiplano*, so I was over 14,000 feet above sea level. It was an experience I have never forgotten – the awe and majesty of the sights.

Mountains and high places are significant in our readings this weekend. Indeed, mountains and high places are significant in the story of salvation. The mountains and high places are seen as places of ‘encounter’ with God, meeting Him in the heights, like Abraham (Moriah), Moses (Sinai), Elijah (Carmel), David (Zion), Peter, James and John (Tabor), and the Lord Jesus Himself (Olives). This week we climb with Peter, James and John to Mount Tabor, but whereas they had no idea what/who they would encounter, we know the story of today’s gospel, and the magnificent vision of the Transfiguration of Jesus, a further revelation of His divinity by His heavenly Father.

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

The mountains and high places may sound quite ‘magical’, but we know we can encounter God in any place and at any time.

- a) Where is the place you feel most comfortable at in order to ‘encounter’ God? (Your favourite prayer place, perhaps?)
- b) Is there a particular time of day which is ‘your time’ for prayer, for reflection, or for other spiritual exercises?
- c) Are there any particular things (props) that help you create an atmosphere for prayer and reflection?

The Table of the Word

Many years ago I remember reading a book, written in 1996 by Capuchin Keith Clark, *Make Space, Make Symbols. A Personal Journey Into Prayer*. He wrote about places, times of day, and things that may characterize our prayer times: a place like a park, or a favourite comfortable chair; a time of day like early in the morning (before everyone else is up and active) or on the bus or train home from work; and things like a lighted candle, or an open Bible. These may seem insignificant, but he wrote about how they have the potential to enhance our prayer time, instead of trying to be like a square peg in a round hole. I remember, during the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, the first night I was instructed to get up in the middle of the night to pray for an hour. I did it the first time, and advised the retreat director that this was not a good hour for me, and I was never subjected to that penance again. Why put obstacles in our way when for most of us the most effective prayer experience comes from a quiet and relaxed atmosphere, where our attention can be on the Lord, and our thoughts and reflections? We will each find our own ‘mountain or high place’ to encounter God. Once we have found it, we have found a ‘home’ to invite the Lord in to dwell with us. There He will reveal Himself to us, as He did in the mountains and high places.

Penitential Rite:

God continually reveals Himself, as He did to Abraham, to Paul, and to Peter, James and John. We are continually invited into relationship with Him, to share in His life, and to share that life with others.

Lord Jesus, help us to listen to Your saving Word,
Christ Jesus, we know You are with us always,
Lord Jesus, fill us with Your Holy Spirit,

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray:

Dear Father,

I thank You for the fulfilment of Your Word.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and they beheld His glory,
the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father,
full of grace and truth.

I thank You for Your divine power that was seen here on earth,
it is because of this that we can come together and celebrate You.

I pray that we do not take Your power for granted
and I pray that we truly understand Your greatness, Amen.

(author unknown)

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 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18)*

God put Abraham to the test. "Abraham, Abraham" he called. "Here I am" he replied.

"Take your son," God said "your only child Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him as a burnt offering, on a mountain I will point out to you."

When they arrived at the place of God had pointed out to him, Abraham built an altar there, and arranged the wood. Then, he bound his son Isaac and put him on the altar, on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and seized the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven. "Abraham, Abraham" he said. "I am here," he replied. "Do not raise your hand against the boy" the angel said. "Do not harm him, for now I know you fear God. You have not refused me your son, your only son." Then looking up, Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush. He took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son.

The angel of the Lord called Abraham a second time from heaven. "I swear by my own self – it is the Lord who speaks – because you have done this, because you have not refused me your son, your only son, I will shower blessings on you, I will make your descendants as many as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore. Your descendants shall gain possession of the gates of their enemies. All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, as a reward for your obedience".

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

SECOND READING (*Romans 8:31-34*)

With God on our side who can be against us? Since God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up to benefit us all, we may be certain, after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything he can give. Could anyone accuse those that God has chosen? When God acquits, could anyone condemn? Could Christ Jesus? No! He not only died for us – he rose from the dead, and there at God’s right hand he stands and pleads for us.

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

GOSPEL (*Mark 9:2-10*)

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them.

Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus: “Rabbi,” he said “It is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” He did not know what to say; they were so frightened.

And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and there came a voice from the cloud, “This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.” Then suddenly, when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore but only Jesus.

As they came down the mountain, he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves, they discussed what “rising from the dead” could mean.

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

COMMENTARY:

The First Reading introduces us to our ‘father in faith,’ Abraham, at the most crucial moment in his response to God – following the instructions of God to offer, in sacrifice, his only son, Isaac. After he and Sarah had waited so long for a son, we can only begin to imagine the weight of such an action by Abraham. Yet, trusting in God, he did as the Lord God asked. And God rewarded the faith of Abraham, not only by providing a ram, but fulfilling His promise to make his descendants “as many as the stars of heaven, and the grains of sand on the seashore”. This reading challenges us in our own obedience to God, and our willingness to do His will.

St. Paul’s words bolster the Romans. He reminds them that God is on their side, that He is with them, despite the challenges and difficulties they have in living a true Christian life. He says that Christ is “at God’s right hand [where] he stands and pleads for us”. Jesus is our advocate before the Father. We may find it difficult, at times, to believe “that he will not refuse anything he can give”, as sometimes our prayers go unanswered. Upon further reflection we may discover that at times our prayers are self-serving, and are more a demand of ‘our’ will than the will of God.

Whenever I read this gospel I think of Cecil B. DeMille, the famous Hollywood director. This is because I believe that, for him, the words of the Father would be underwhelming. Of all the words that Cecil would have liked to have put in the mouth of the Father, I would think there would be a lot more to say than repeating His words at the Baptism in the River Jordan, and only adding “Listen to him”. However, these words are not insignificant, as this glorious transfiguration made Peter, James and John more aware of who they were accompanying. The presence of Moses and Elijah are significant – Moses representing the Law and Elijah the Prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus is

the fullness of revelation, so – above all – we should “listen to him”. He has the words of everlasting life! I can imagine that from this moment forward Peter, James and John looked at Jesus in a very different way, having seen the revelation of His glory, and took His profound teachings much more seriously. I don’t know how they could have kept silent about this event, following the instructions of Jesus.

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

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. “Here I am” (Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18)

Abraham was a willing follower of the God of the covenant. Despite the demand of God, Abraham was willing to do as God instructed, and sacrifice his only son.

- a) Can we identify a moment when the Lord has asked a great sacrifice of us? How did we respond?
- b) How did we feel blessed by God, because of our act of faith, or did we miss out on the opportunity for blessing?

2. “With God on our side who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31-34)

In our lives, we may sometimes find ourselves in difficult situations, even in our faithful following of Jesus. At times we may feel alone, abandoned, or forgotten. St. Paul assures the Romans that this is not the case, and that Jesus Christ is with them, at the side of the Father, interceding for them.

- a) Have we had an experience of “God on our side” when we really needed it? What form did it take?
- b) Has there been something that God “refused” me in prayer, that I (later) realized was for my spiritual benefit?

3. “This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to Him” (Mark 9:2-10)

I always like to make a distinction between ‘hearing’ and ‘listening’. ‘Hearing’ is a physiological attribute, whereas (for me) ‘listening’ implies that I accept what I have heard, and will act on it. We hear many things during the day, some of them only ‘noise’, but there are moments during the day when we listen to what we hear, and respond.

- a) How has my ‘listening’ to the Lord grown through my experience of sharing in ‘Celebrating the Word’?
- b) Can I identify a moment in my life when I was not willing to ‘listen’, although I did ‘hear’ God’s call? What happened?

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. The intent is to 'outreach' to the larger community. The facilitator should allow for a **moderate pause** between each of the suggestions for reflection and action.)

1. Word of the Week: "Here I am."

2. Suggestions for the Week:

During this week, look for moments when you echoed the words of Abraham, "Here I am", to the call of the Lord. Be more conscious of active 'listening' that leads to action inspired by the Holy Spirit. Recall the glory of Jesus, as God-made-human, revealed in the Transfiguration, and recognize that His Word, and the word you experience in your prayer, are moments for you to not only 'listen', but to respond in a grace-filled/graceful way to the call of God.

3. Intercessions: (Response: **We listen to you, O Lord**)

To encounter God we do not need to climb a mountain or a high place. We can pray where we are, as we are. With that confidence that Jesus intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father, let us present our prayer:

That, like Abraham, we will be willing to follow the Lord's will. We pray ...

That those who doubt the presence of the Lord in their lives, may experience that security that comes from knowing the truth of God's love. We pray ...

That we will listen attentively to the voice of Jesus, calling us to follow Him, and to be faithful to the Father's will. We pray ...

That our prayer lives will be enhanced by finding our time, our place, and our way to listen to God's voice. We pray ...

That we may continue to grow in our faith, and bear witness to it. We pray ...

For all our sisters and brothers who have shared in 'Celebrating the Word' this week, that they will all be richly blessed. We pray ...

How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray:

Eternal God,

Your Son was glorified on earth together with You,

with the glory which He had with You before the world was.

I thank You for sending Your only begotten Son so that we could all be saved
and so that we could have an example on how to live on earth.

On this Sunday, I thank You for the glorification of Your Son
and the power that was made known in Him,

because I believe that we too can experience Your power here on earth, Amen.

(author unknown)

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

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries 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. **Email**: 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).