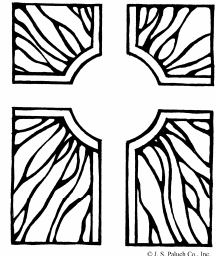


SECOND SUNDAY LENT (FEBRUARY 17, '08)

GENESIS 12:1-4 2 TIMOTHY 1:8-10 MATTHEW 17:1-9

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## HOW WELL DO I LISTEN?

From Adam, with whom we began to pray as a community last Sunday, we move now in the first reading to Abraham, the great father of faith, and the pioneer of the spiritual journey that leads us to Jesus Christ. Abraham is venerated not only by us Christians as *our* spiritual patriarch but by the Jews and Muslims as well. More than half the world's population continue to find a blessing in him.

Three major world religions all look back to a nomad as our ancestral leader. Living in tents, surrounded by the flock that were their livelihood, Abraham and Sara had no permanent address. Whenever their flocks had depleted the food supply in a particular area, they struck camp and moved on.

If we were called upon to make a journey, we would be very careful to know where we are going with the help of AAA or Mapquest on the internet, what supplies to take, what places we might stop to rest and refresh ourselves, and get reservations in hotels or motels along the way. I might add we would figure what to do with the dog or cat in our absence. Abraham had none of these conveniences, and as the author of the Hebrews puts it: 'By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was to go.' (11:8).

One thing we are sure of. He was listening very carefully to what God was asking. It could not have been easy. He was possibly around 75 years old and Sarah around 65. When called by God they left the safety of their situation to venture forth into the truly unknown. Pure madness – at least that would be our first thought! But they were willing to listen to God and to "step outside the box," as the saying goes, which means they were willing to take a risk, a big risk.

Our journey with the Lord is not unlike theirs in that we in faith let our roots sink deeply into no earthly place and our security is in none other than God. On the way, however, we can let our roots sink into those values of our

modern culture which make it a challenge to keep our eyes on God's desires for us. Abraham's call and response to God has become the model of every other call. Like him, we are called again and again to leave the safe and familiar, the sound and the sane, to venture into territories unknown, uncharted and unsure. This can be something to happen to us even on a daily basis.

Such is the call to the infant to leave the safety of the womb to be born into an often unfriendly world. Such is the call to the dying to leave the relative security of this world for a better but unknown world. In between birth and death, we experience this call countless times in our lives when we must leave the cozy cocoon of home for school, and then the enjoyable life of school for the first job. Then we leave our parents to take on the responsibilities of the married life, or the single life, until the day of our retirement. It never ends, this constant moving in and out of these life experiences and transitions. We call these times "transitions" or simply "change." In a way we are as truly nomads as Abraham and Sarah ever were.

In our second reading, the author suggests another theme in that he encourages those who have answered God's call to holiness to consider the *quality and consistency* of their response. Wise teacher that he was, this early Christian writer also reminds believers that God's call is *completely unmerited and gratuitous*.

The Lord provided his apostles with special "moments of grace", such as his revelation to them of who he was at his transfiguration. Such moments are special moments of God's presence to us to empower us to deal with trials that must come in our lives. Just as crazy as that voice that spoke to Abraham centuries earlier, this voice addressed the disciples with Jesus and in so doing, addressed their folly: "This is my beloved Son; with him, I am well please; listen to him." That was it. As suddenly as the voice spoke, it stopped, leaving our Lord with his friends alone on the wind-swept mountain. Somehow, Peter, James, and John, found the courage to listen to that voice. Such moments of grace are ours to experience if we but listen for them.

Their courage and example might help us to open our hearts to listen to the Lord. In time, in place of any three shrines they suggested be left there on

that spot, there would be one day three crosses with one holding the nail-pierced flesh of their beloved Teacher, God's beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Do we have a sense of the awe which must have inspired them to follow him, even in their faltering way to the cross? This event would certainly help them through the terrible events which were to follow and which they were not ready to believe could ever happen.

Where do we look for those 'aha' moments of grace, those moments wherein we recognize God's special love for me, for you, that empower you and me to deal with the inevitable trials and challenges those trials entail?

Right now, let us hear those words of the Scripture: *A shining cloud came over Jesus, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my own dear Son.'* (Mt 17:5).

When he was an old man, Peter would write: *With our own eyes we saw his greatness...We were there...when the voice came to Jesus....We ourselves heard this voice...when we were with him on the holy mountain.* (2 Pt 1:16-18)

Theologians call that the experience of the disciples and this child was a "moment of grace." It is a moment when the border between heaven and earth fade and, for a brief second, the glory of God shines through into our lives and world. It is a moment, when for a brief second, God's presence is felt in our lives in an unmistakable way.

We have had such moments in our life. We may call them 'peak moments.' They are times when we are blessed with a glimpse of the world through the eyes of faith. It may be after receiving communion. It may be unexpectedly when someone makes a remark to awaken in our hearts some special moment, Or it may occur during that precious period of time at night when we sit alone listening to the sounds of the night. It can even be in the quiet of the car heading into work or out of town after a day of work – or both.

Unless we are careful we won't rest in the presence of God, in awe and wonder, letting the experience touch the very heart of who we are. As a result the moment fades and is lost. We will soon forget the great gift which God blessed us.

It is upon such moments that we build our lives, as the disciples with Jesus were certainly to build their lives. These peak moments are precious, opening

the door for us to God's presence. Awareness of God's presence is a great gift. If God gives it to me, as he does from time to time, what he asks of us is to pause and listen with genuine hearts to what he might say. Any effort on my part, however, to think that I can make myself feel God's presence in me is foolish. I cannot move an inch in prayer unless the Lord touches me first. As it says in John's 1st letter: It is not I who loved the Lord first, but the Lord who has loved me first.

Moments of grace are gifts from God. They are not merited; they can't be won; they can't be manufactured. What we can do is dispose ourselves to receive them, when and as God chooses to give them to us. A few moments of quiet prayer, or the Eucharist when possible helps us to listen carefully with faith in our hearts. Then a day will come – either here or in heaven – when we too will hear a voice, saying to us what the voice on the mountain said of Jesus: *This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased*, and I will no longer have to listen for him and to him as I do now.

What prayer might we make on our journey? Let me suggest something like the following with which I will end this homily:

*Grant me, Lord, to see everything now with new eyes,  
To discern and test the spirits  
That help me read the signs of the time,  
To relish the things that are yours,  
And to communicate them to others.  
Give me the clarity of understanding  
that you gave Ignatius.\**

*\*Pedro Arrupe, Hearts on Fire. ed M. Harter, SJ Inst.Jes.Sources: St. Louis. Mo. 1993, p 55*