

Second Sunday of Lent/Neo Catechumenal Rite of Scrutiny

March 17, 2019

5:00 p.m. Crowley Center/St. Augustine Cathedral

Today is the Second Sunday of Lent, and the Readings from God's Revealed Word are powerful---insightful---inspiring. But today is also St. Patrick's Day. It's a day that the majority of people celebrate, whether they're of Irish descent or not---as the saying goes: "there are two nationalities: those who are Irish, and those who wish they were Irish". So, I wonder what you think: in most people's minds, which is of more significance today: the Second Sunday of Lent; or St. Patrick's Day? How many of you wished someone today a Happy St. Patrick's Day? How many of you wished someone today a Happy Second Sunday of Lent?

Now, let me ask you another question. How many of you like go to a movie, or start reading a mystery novel, and have someone tell you the ending? Most of us don't like that; it takes the fun, or any suspense, out of finding out for ourselves. We have come to use the term: "spoiler alert" to warn people if they don't want to hear the details about some particular event if they haven't had a chance to experience it themselves. On the other hand, sometimes it's good to tell the end of the story beforehand to reassure someone. If someone's struggling/worried/fearful, it really helps for someone who has been through a similar experience to reassure us.....to tell us it will be OK.

I think, in a way, that's what Jesus was doing for Peter, James and John---His three closest disciples---when He took them with Him to the top of the mountain to pray. And what a revelation Peter, James and John had: Jesus, joined by the two great Patriarchs of the Old Testament: Moses, the one to encounter God in the "Burning Bush" on another mountain, Mt. Tabor, and to receive the 10 Commandments on Mt. Horeb; and Elijah, the great Prophet who "heard the still, small Voice of God in the tiny whisper" on Mt. Horeb. Jesus let His Apostles listen in on the intimate and profound conversation that those three were having about Jesus' impending suffering/death on Mt. Calvary, both to reassure Him, and to allow the Apostles to know what was coming. But the highpoint was the "theophany", in the appearance of the Holy Spirit, and the Voice of the Father, saying: "This is My Chosen/My Beloved Son; Listen to Him."

That's what the Church does for us as well, every Lent, on this, the 2nd Sunday of Lent---we hear one of the Synoptic Gospel writers' version of this extraordinary event---this year from St. Luke.

In my own speculation and reflection over the years on this Transfiguration Event, I've come to my own conclusion (though it's not verified anywhere or found in the Gospels). Jesus went off to pray by Himself---99 percent of the time---and He'd always either go off "very early in the morning" before anyone would notice; Or, He would directly send the Apostles off to do something else while He went to pray. Why? Could it be that every time Jesus went to pray, He was so absorbed in His communication with His Father that a similar experience took place? Could it be that perhaps every time Jesus was deep in prayer with His Father, that He changed---was "transfigured/transformed"---As One Who was both fully human and fully Divine, at those

moments, His Divinity shone through and beyond His humanity? If that's plausible, perhaps Jesus wanted His three closest followers to enter into that experience once before Jesus would enter into His awful 40 hours of betrayal, torture; His suffering, crucifixion, death and burial. This would serve as a "preview" of sorts of what the Resurrection would be, taking them to the end of the Story of His Redemption to see how it ends: **not** in death and defeat, but in victory and Glorification?!

Unless you are a person of faith, or disposed to faith, that is a revelation a faith-less would not possibly be able to grasp.

I think that's what St. Paul in his Letter to the Philippians was focused on in our Second Reading this evening, and what moved him to "tears", as he shared there: "Many conduct themselves as enemies of the Cross of Christ." St. Paul went on to explain the symptoms of those who fall into that category: the "goal" for their lives is destruction; their "god" is their stomach/themselves/their pleasure; their "glory" is in their shameful conduct; and their "grasp" of reality (their mind) is limited to "earthly things".

The awful "terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand three days ago is a sign of the very thing that Paul described as "enemies of Christ". It was a terrorist attack that was rooted in absolute hatred; to viciously murder/slaughter innocent people during their time of prayer----truly heinous! Unfortunately we're living in a world that is full of many different "signs" of what brought St. Paul to tears, and probably brings us to tears as well. Sins of hatred, anger, division, lust,---the whole host of "capital sins" committed by people who live only for themselves, who are only concerned about the "here and now", with no awareness of their eternal destiny. And if they stay in that mindset, and do not make any room in their lives for God and God's ways, the likely loss of the Gift of Salvation for them is a tragedy that should move us to tears every time that happens.

The First Reading this evening, taking us back to the very beginning of Revelation, shows us that, from the first moment of revealing Himself to humanity, following the "Fall from Grace" due to Sin and the great Flood, beginning with Abram, down to this very moment of our lives, God is constantly inviting us, encouraging us, to enter into the Covenant of Love and Mercy that God wants for ALL people.

That's what we heard God revealing to Abram for the first time, as the Lord God offered the early version of the Covenant, when God told Abram to try to count the number of stars in the sky. Have you ever tried to do that? It's impossible. But that was God's way of saying that those born of the Promise He made to Abram would all receive the Promise of Salvation if they embraced that Covenant. We heard the Lord God's words: "To you and your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River, the Euphrates." And God would formalize that Covenant by saying: "You are to be My People, and I will be Your God."---the promise of unconditional and Faithful Love and Mercy.

My dear sisters and brothers of the Neo Catechumenal Way, your participation in "the Way", and your willingness to participate in this beautiful process of drawing closer to Jesus, and deeper in relationship with Him through the precious gift of our Baptism into Christ, your

participation in the Holy Eucharist, and in the Life of the Church, is very much what God's Revealed Word that we have heard today calls all of us to do. I rejoice to see you taking this Journey of Faith so seriously, as God wants ALL of us to do. I am inspired by your "pilgrimage" in "the Way", and I support you in all the ways you are trying to be Faithful to God and His Covenant of Love and Mercy that He has fulfilled for us in Jesus. And I encourage you to remain faithful; to keep your eyes on Jesus; to enter more deeply into your prayer with Jesus so that He can "transfigure" and "transform" you more and more into His likeness.

I think this quote from today's great Saint Patrick is fitting for us as we conclude: "The sun which we see rising for us each day at God's command, that sun will never reign nor will its splendor continue forever..... But we believe in and adore the true Son, that is, Christ, Who will never perish. Nor will they perish who do His will; rather they will abide forever, just as Christ will abide forever."

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, as we continue throughout this very important Lenten journey, and move forward on our Journey of Faith in this world, let us keep our eyes on the Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And let us heed the powerful words of the Father: "This is My Chosen, My Beloved Son; Listen to Him."

God bless you, now and always.