

**2nd Sunday of Lent (A)**  
**(Genesis 12:1-4 / Matthew 17:1-9)**  
**16.03.2014**

We should not be surprised by the attitude of the disciples when they heard the voice from the cloud. I think that most of us here today would be overcome with fear if God himself was suddenly talking to us from heaven. After all, the disciples believed that no one can see God and live (Cf. Ex 33:20).

Fear is a feeling which is never very far from each one of us. In our daily lives our hearts and minds have been, are or will be confronted with fear.

Whether it is a deep-seated fear about something important or just a superficial chill of apprehension about a trivial matter, we have to contend with fears. And part of the challenge is that most of the time fears do not come to us as a “roaring lion (...) looking for someone to devour” (1P 5:8), but like a mouse nibbling away at our peace, our self-confidence and our sense of security.

This explains why we are always tempted to cling to people, to things and to experiences of the past, why we are so driven by the desire to possess. When we possess we feel secure. Our many ways of clinging to everything and anything are ways for us to protect ourselves from our fears.

And yet God shows us that there is another way. The call he addressed to Abram: “Leave your country” could be translated for our modern ears as follows: “Let go and trust”. Abram could have been legitimately afraid of God’s call to leave everything which was dear to him, his family and his familiar surroundings. However Abram let go and trusted in God’s promise.

To trust and to let go work together: because we trust we are able to let go and because we let go we grow in trust. The patient and perseverant practice of trusting and letting go is the way for us to learn to live with our fears and move on with them into life. You noticed that I did not say “to live without fears” but “to live with our fears”. Somebody who would be completely without fears would be either very naïve or dangerously blind person, or maybe both.

To live with fear and not be afraid is the test of our maturity, of our ability to cope with life as it really is. Maybe to fear is the good sign that we take things seriously, that people and events matter to us, that we cannot just be detached spectators when it comes to life and love. Maybe fear is like a grain of sand in the cogwheel of life, whose function is to remind us that we should never take for granted our life and all our relationships.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus is aware of the fear of the disciples and we read that: he came up to them, he touched them and he invited them to stand up.

Three important verbs which sum up Jesus’ ministry and mission: to come, to touch and to stand up.

Jesus comes to all those who are afraid, afraid to live and to die, to hope and to despair, to fall and to stand up, afraid to relate to others and afraid to be alone. Jesus comes and never ceases to repeat over and over again: “Do not be afraid”. The insight given to us by the episode of the Transfiguration is that he comes to us not only as a good preacher or a mighty prophet but as God, as our healer and Saviour. Sometimes people come to us but their mind is elsewhere, they are busy with their iphone, not really paying attention to us. Jesus comes and is really present, totally present to who we are, what we feel and what we carry in our lives.

In the Old Testament, the people were very aware of the symbolical and physical meanings of touching one another. There were many rules and regulations about purity and contamination. Everyone who touched the consecrated offering became consecrated (Lv 6:18) and everyone who touched something unclean became unclean (Lv 11:24).

When Jesus touches the disciples he is not contaminated by their sinfulness but rather he shares with them his strength so that they may be able to stand up in life. Today again he wants to touch us with care and compassion so that we may be restored to our dignity as children of God, freed from fear.

Jesus does not touch us with gloves or from the tip of his fingers, but like a good shepherd he carries us on his shoulders, or like the father of the prodigal son, he hugs us with tenderness.

He behaves in such an amazing way because he wants us to stand up, literally in the Greek text it is the same word which is used for the Resurrection: he comes so that we may rise up. The truth is that we are not called to be a prostrated and fearful people.

At Easter we will reclaim our true identity as a risen people. This Lenten season is given to us in order to prepare us for this experience of restoration and renewal.

The challenge is that we need to allow the Lord to come to us and to touch us. Is it not that very often we keep the Lord at arm's length? For sure, it is safer and less demanding for us to keep him in a small box, to confine him to an enclosed and manageable area of our lives.

All that we undertake during Lent, all that our Church invites us to do: to pray, to read the Scriptures, to receive the Sacraments of reconciliation and of the Eucharist, to give from what we have and from who we are, all these aspects of our Christian life are meant to open us to the Lord's healing and transforming touch, so that at Easter we may be able, with Christ, to rise again from death and fear, from sin and failures, from loneliness and sadness.

In the episode of the Transfiguration, we have a wonderful prophecy of what will happen at Easter. The Lord comes down from Mount Tabor in order to heal the disciples from their fears. On Mount Golgotha, the Lord will go down into the depth of our human forsakenness and humiliation in order to lift us up and to free us from all fears.

May we allow the Lord to touch our hearts and our lives so that we may truly live with him.