

2nd Sunday of Lent (A)
(Genesis 12:1-4 / Matthew 17:1-9)
05.03.2023
Walk - Heart

Today our two readings begin with the same theme. In the book of Genesis, we heard the Lord say to Abram: “Leave your country, your family and your father’s house, for the land I will show you.” And the evangelist Matthew introduces the episode of the Transfiguration with: “Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain.”

For Abram and for Peter, James and John, to see the promised land or the transfigured Lord required a journey from one place to another. It was a faith journey and, while for them it implied a walk along the dusty roads of the Middle East, for us today it is instead an inner pilgrimage which entails detachment and trust.

So it is clear, and yet it is important to repeat it every year, our observance of the Lenten season is not just about skipping some meals, stopping to eat sweets or drink alcohol. It is not about a temporary change in order to give a gloomy tint and austere flavour to our daily life. It is not about showing God and others, how good we can be.

The Lenten season should lead us on a journey which prepares us, as the letter to the Hebrews puts it, for “events as yet unseen” (11:7), something unique which has the power to transform our lives and the life of the world. That is where one aspect of the problem comes in: our Lenten journey is conditioned by its end.

Abram had to be prepared for the promised land; Peter, James and John had to be prepared for the Transfiguration. We have to prepare our hearts for something which is not petty or casual. What we are talking about here is the Resurrection of the Lord. Lent is about preparing us to participate in this amazing event and how it impacts on our lives.

Lent is a season during which we focus our attention on something we may be inclined to neglect the rest of the year: namely our heart.

It is the season when we call upon God’s grace to water our hearts so that they may be ready to see, to hear and to welcome the Resurrection of the Lord. It is a season, wherein we prepare our cold hearts to be warmed again at the fire of the Easter Vigil.

It is interesting to notice the parallel that exists between the story of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-25) and the episode of the Transfiguration. In both cases the story begins with a walk and ends with a vision. The great difference lies in the fact that while, on Mount Tabor, the three disciples did not understand the meaning of the vision; at Emmaus, the hearts of the 2 disciples burnt within them (v. 32) and they clearly saw the implication of the vision for their lives.

During this Lenten season we are supposed to walk, to walk together with the Lord. Peter, James and John did not go the high mountain on their own, each one on his own personal track. They walked together. This fact is important for us today: it is as church, as people of God, that we engage in the way of repentance and conversion. We are not alone, solitary wayfarers or individualistic spiritual seekers. While we have to make a personal decision in regard to the way we want to live our Lenten pilgrimage, we have to be careful not to turn our fasting, or our times of prayer into self-gratifying and self-satisfying individual exploits and achievements. Lent is not about me, myself alone. It is as members of the Body of Christ that we journey and prepare our hearts for Easter.

The second aspect which is essential for a proper observance of the Lenten season is that Christ must be at the centre of all that we do and say, and everything we undertake. The forty days of Lent are an opportunity for us to restore the primacy of Christ in our lives, to allow him to reign as king in every area of our being, especially those areas where we may be tempted to follow the rule of petty gods and small idols.

The words of the prophet Joel we heard on Ash Wednesday: "Let your hearts be broken" (2:13) evoke for us the cleansing of our hearts from all our idols, the kneading of the dough of our hearts in preparation for the fire of Easter.

In a way prayer, spending more time in attentive listening of the Word of God; fasting from food, sounds and images; alms-giving, the sharing of one's time and skills with those in need should be a kind of breaking open of our hardened hearts.

A breaking of the heart which is not meant for destruction but for restoration and healing.

On these days, let us courageously get up, let us rise and walk with the Lord and with one another, encouraging and supporting one another along the way.

Just as was the case at the end of our Gospel reading, Jesus wants to touch us to comfort and reassure us. His touch conveys love and understanding in the midst of fear. He says to each one of us: "Stand up and do not be afraid."

The word translated in English by "Stand up" is the Greek word used for the Resurrection. The Lord calls upon us to rise from all that prevents us from being fully alive. That is what Lent is all about. We are not supposed to remain stuck in the mud of our sins, prisoners of our fears, settled in the laziness of our complacency. We are not supposed to satisfy ourselves to just barely survive.

In the event of the Transfiguration, what happened to Jesus is promised to us: "The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Mt 13:43).

Let us not delay in allowing Jesus to accomplish his work in our hearts so that, at Easter, our hearts may be so stretched, so expanded that they may welcome and share generously the joy and the peace our world longs for.