

Second Sunday of Lent, B – February 25, 2018 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.  
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 900 words

Each one of us has had a “Transfiguration moment” – a moment of great spiritual consolation – at some time or another in our walk with the Lord. For converts, it may have been the period leading up to and immediately following conversion to the Catholic faith. For many, it may have been a particularly powerful experience of the sacrament of confession. It could have been a marvelous and unexpected answer to prayer. However it happened, I would wager that we have all been able to relate to Peter at one point or another: “Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents...” – in other words, let’s stay on the mountain; let’s not lose this wonderful experience; let’s not return to the drudgery of life in the valley of tears below.

But return we must, and sometimes our experience is just like that of Peter, James, and John also: we are left with more questions than we had before. They did not understand what it meant for Christ to rise from the dead; that is, they also did not fully understand his mission or what he would yet have to suffer. We do not understand what we will have to suffer, either. In fact, the trials of life often come as a surprise to us, and we are left wondering how it is that we can ever make it up the mountain to heaven. The words of the prophet Jeremiah may often ring true: “You duped me, O Lord, and I let myself be duped...”<sup>1</sup> After granting us a glimpse of the glory that awaits us, God puts us very much back in the reality of the here and now – and sometimes we may even wonder if we weren’t better off before we had that glimpse.

Pope St. John Paul spoke of the “obscurity of faith”;<sup>2</sup> St. Paul put it a different way, saying that “we walk by faith, not by sight”.<sup>3</sup> However we phrase it, one thing is abundantly clear to anyone who gives an earnest shot at living the Christian life: it isn’t easy, and we often cannot see clearly how God is leading us to our destination. But the story of Abraham from our first reading reminds us that seeing where God leads is not necessary; rather, faithful obedience is what saves us. Indeed, Abraham is held up in the scriptures as our father in the faith, so perfectly did he model that virtue. He was profoundly convinced that God would not lead him astray, even as God seemingly asked of him the unthinkable. As he would come to see through his obedience, God put him to the test – and Abraham passed that test. Abraham’s path up the mountain, so to speak, had some very unusual twists and turns. He could not necessarily always see where that path was leading. But he was obedient – and he arrived at the goal.

Yes, I think that Abraham, as he carried his son off to sacrifice him in obedience to what God had apparently commanded, could very easily have uttered Jeremiah’s words: “You duped me, O Lord, and I let myself be duped...”. Our Blessed Mother, as she held her Son’s lifeless body after he was taken down from the cross, could have uttered those words: “You duped me, O Lord...”. But Abraham did not; Mary did not. No, they – and all the saints – lived faith to an heroic degree. They knew that for however unusual, difficult, or seemingly impossible the path became, if they followed God obediently on it then he would keep his promises. Think of St. Paul, our patron: personally called by Christ out of the error of his former ways, then given a singular mission. But then? He was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked three times, and so forth. Yet in our second reading Paul was not talking about having been duped; no, without any trace of bitterness – and full of faith – he said confidently: “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

God is on our side, and no matter how difficult the trials of this life may be, he intends to lead each of us up the mountain to heaven. He gives us glimpses of our destination from time to time so that we will not forget that the goal is worth it. And then he always invites us to the

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 20:7.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, nn. 14 and 17, particularly quoting St. John of the Cross.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:7.

obedience of faith. He required that obedience of his own mother and of his greatest saints in every age. He even required it of his own Son, as Paul also told us in the second reading: “He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?” He will give us everything – if we follow the one who “was obedient unto death, even death on a cross”.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, God requires this obedience of us, also. The voice from the cloud says to us, too: “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.” Yes Lord, I want to obey. Help me not to become bitter – to think you have led me astray. Blessed Mother, help me to follow obediently, wherever the Lord leads and as difficult as it may be, till someday the cloud clears and I see him, you, Abraham, and all the saints face-to-face: up on the mountaintop, in the glory of heaven. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Philippians 2:8.