

GOD'S WAY - SO DIFFERENT THAN OUR WAY

Last Sunday, the first Sunday of Lent, the gospel story was of Jesus going into the desert for forty days, praying and fasting and then being tempted by the devil to take the easy way out in accomplishing man's redemption by following his suggestions. Jesus gave an emphatic no to each temptation. He would do it God's way. And the message of this Gospel was very clear to all true followers and believers in Jesus. What may on the surface seem to be the right way, that is letting one do it their way, was in reality the wrong way. Trust in the Lord; trust in God; trust in Jesus! What may seem to be foolish on the surface is in reality filled with divine wisdom and is the only way to accomplish God's plan for salvation.

In today's Gospel we hear of another strange story, related in each of the four gospels, and referred to by Peter in the Acts of the Apostles. The time for Jesus to enter the final act of man's redemption is nearing. Jesus asks three of his Apostles to come with him to the top of Mt. Tabor. The three apostles, Simon Peter, James and John are admittedly the top three choices of Jesus to be his closest companions; Simon is the head of the Apostles; James would become a powerful voice in Jerusalem after Christ had ascended to Heaven, and John, the youngest of the Apostles was certainly considered by his fellow Apostles to be the closest to Jesus personally. So here they are, all following Jesus to the top of this moderately high mountain, not really a very long walk and not that steep. Once at the top they look around, wondering just what was going to happen now. Then suddenly the appearance of Jesus begins to change; he becomes radiantly white, almost to the point of being impossible to look at, yet very clearly seen without any difficulty. Then out of nowhere two other men are standing next to Jesus, each of them also dazzling white yet easily seen, and each of them talking with Jesus about his upcoming sacrifice, giving himself to God his father as a victim to atone for man's wrongdoing. From the way the two unknown men with Jesus are talking it quickly becomes obvious that one of them is Moses and the other is the great prophet Elijah, the greatest of all the prophets of the Old Testament. As Luke puts it in today's Gospel, they were discussing the great exodus that Jesus was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.

The use of the word exodus is most revealing as to the real nature of what Jesus was about to accomplish. Moses was the man chosen by God to lead his people to freedom from the slavery of the Egyptians. The Old Testament tells of how difficult it was for Moses to convince the Pharaoh to let the people go. Wonder after wonder, each described as a plague, were predicted by Moses as punishment if the Pharaoh would let them go. An invasion of locusts, the Nile river turning to blood, three days of unbelievable darkness, and more would not convince the Pharaoh. None of the people of God, the Jewish people, were affected by the plagues. Even this would not persuade the Pharaoh. And then came the last plague, the threat that on a certain night, the first born of every Egyptian and the first born of every animal would die. However, the Jewish people would be saved if each of them sacrificed a lamb and smeared its blood over the lintel of the house where they lived. That night, the angel of death would pass over the land, killing every first born but not touching anyone in the houses protected by the blood of the lamb. And so it happened! It would forever be known as the Passover of the Lord and would be celebrated down through the ages even until our own day in 2010. This event occurred so long ago, but once Moses led the people out of Egypt, he prescribed that this Passover should be celebrated each year as a remembrance of what God has done for his people. a miracle beyond human imagination.

It was this event that Jesus, Moses and Elijah were talking about, the greatest of all the things God had done for his people and this event was to be repeated by Jesus in his upcoming passion and death culminating in his resurrection three days later. All this was just too much for the three Apostles, They fell to their knees and then simply collapsed on the ground. Peter alone managed to mumble something about erecting some sort of monument, but he spoke more out of fear than anything else. Then suddenly, the great Theophany! The voice of God thundered above them yet was so gentle. "This is my chosen Son; listen to him. The three Apostle simply cowered in fear, covering their faces so that they would and could not see. And then silence! A calm! It was all over. As they peered through their fingers covering their faces, they saw only Jesus standing there, the Jesus they knew, the Jesus they loved, the Jesus they trusted. None of them could say a word. Speechless, they simply followed him down the mountain each in their own minds going over and over all that had just happened on the top of that mountain. The whole event was simply indescribable and they knew that it would be most difficult to try to explain to their fellow Apostles all that had happened. They decided to all keep mum. In the other Gospels, it is mentioned that Jesus also told them not to say a word until after his resurrection. Exactly what that meant they did not know for it was something way beyond their ability to comprehend or even to describe They also sensed that there was so much that was still to happen within the next month or so all of which they were simply not prepared to comprehend. It was all in the divine plan of God. They each had much to think over not only coming down the mountain but then for days later. In silence they ended this extraordinary day.

For the moment one must now try to understand what the Church is attempting to do as we begin the second week of Lent. First, it is easy to see that the episode of Christ being tempted in the desert is to give us all a deeper understanding of the plan of God. This was to be God's plan and it was he who would see it through to the end. It was not just Jesus's plan as a human being, but his plan as the son of God made man. Now we have the second Sunday and the Church is asking all believers to try and comprehend the wonder of it all. It is totally beyond the human mind to conceive what God has planned. The first reading this Sunday, tells us of the call of Abraham. Here is Abraham and his wife Sarah, both of them in their 80's or 90's being promised that their descendants will be greater than the number of stars in the heavens or the grains of sand on the seashore. No way is this possible for these two humans to do this. But it is God's plan and he will do it impossible or not. Elijah, the greatest of the prophets also saw the destiny of the Israelites and how God against all odds would bring his people out of slavery and make of them a great nation. It seemed a dream and yet it happened in the most startling of ways.

The whole point is that as we enter the second week of lent, we must not focus so much on our sins and our propensity to do wrong, but to also focus on the enormity of what God not only has done through his Son giving his life that we might live, but that our destiny is way, way beyond what we can today truly even begin to comprehend So lent or no lent, we enter this second week with an undying hope and trust that the word of God will be fulfilled for each and every one of us in his way. "Come, Follow me!"

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