

“A Moment of Grace”

2nd Sunday in Lent

Homily Given by Rev. Mr. Peter B. Swan, Sr.

February 21, 2016

(Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18), (Philippians 3:17-4:1), (Luke 9: 28b-36)

Our Gospel today comes after the passage where Jesus had just told His disciples that “*The Son of man must suffer, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day, be raised from the dead.*” This was no good news to the disciples who expected Jesus, as the Messiah, to confront and topple the Roman army of occupation and restore the kingdom to Israel. Many of them would have begun to have second thoughts: Is this Jesus really the expected Messiah? Is he really the Anointed One of God who is to come? Should we go along with him to the showdown in Jerusalem, or should we back off before it is too late? At this point, Jesus must have felt very much alone and dejected.

So one fine morning, a few days later, Jesus invites the three leaders of the group (Peter, James and John) to go with him for a prayer session on the mountain. The mountain is a place of encounter with God. Moses encountered God on the mountain, and so did Elijah. Once on the mountain, Jesus goes into prayer. While He was praying, his face changed in appearance and His clothing became dazzling white. Then, from the cloud came a voice that said, “***This is my chosen Son; listen to Him.***” Then the eyes of the apostles, their spiritual eyes, were opened and they caught a glimpse of the true reality of Jesus that their physical eyes never saw. They saw that the whole, heavenly court was on the side of Jesus and they heard the voice of the invisible God. This was all the confirmation they needed. Jesus was indeed the expected one. Heaven itself has borne witness. Now they would listen to Him and follow Him all the way to the shameful suffering and death in Jerusalem. But no matter what happens, they are now sure of one thing: God is on the side of Jesus; final victory will therefore be His.

What Peter and the disciples experienced on the mountain is what theologians call a “moment of grace”. It is a moment when the border between Heaven and Earth seems to fade for a brief period and the glory of God shines into our world. It is a moment when, for a split second in time, God’s presence is felt in our lives in an unmistakable way. It is a moment when, for a split second in time, we get a glimpse of eternity.

How often do we experience the craziness of life, such that our minds are filled with doubt and we question: “Where is God?” Think of people who have experienced the scandalous lives, the deep-rooted individualism and insensitivity of church people, and they ask, “How can God be in this place?” Many of these end up giving up the faith. Think of people who are traumatized by their experience of social injustice and discrimination. They apply for a job and people who are less qualified than they get the job because they have the right connections or the right accent. They see people advancing in society through unfair means and they ask: “Where is God?” Or you may know someone undergoing a personal and family crisis such as terminal illness, the breakdown in relationship between husband and wife, between parent and child, between friends, or the loss of a loved one and you ask: “Where is God?”

Yesterday, I was struggling with this homily, not getting anywhere, when I received a text message from one of our parishioners. The message read, “I’m sorry to tell you that we fear her time is near. The nurse said that this breathing change is a sign that the end is near.” The person that the text was referring to was a seven year-old girl with terminal brain cancer and has been asleep for the past two months. My first reaction, of course, was to question God,

“Where are you?” I drove to the young girl’s house and when I entered the home, I found the father and mother praying the Rosary, so I joined them. Then, when I went to the room where the child was, there kneeling at her bedside was the child’s grandmother, her aunt and two friends of the family, also praying the Rosary in their own language. I entered the room and, although the child was breathing laboriously, there was a sense of serenity and peace on her face, and I felt that serenity and peace fill the entire room. Later, Fr. John and Charlie arrived and, as Fr. John anointed the child and asked all present to in turn anoint the child, my earlier question was answered. I felt a presence and knew that God was indeed in that room.

Don’t we sometimes feel like the whole world is collapsing on our heads? At times like these, we need to go up to the mountain of prayer and ask God to open our eyes that we may see. When God grants us a glimpse of eternity, then we shall realize that all our troubles in this life are short-lived. Then we have the courage to accept the meaningless suffering of this life, knowing that through it all, God is on our side. All it takes is a little glimpse of Heaven to empower us to take up our daily crosses and follow Jesus, knowing that the cross of Lent is followed by the victory of Easter.

Moments of grace are gifts from God. They cannot be merited. They cannot be won. They cannot be programmed. All we can do is make ourselves available to receive them, when and where God chooses. And how do we do this? How do we dispose ourselves to receive these so-called “Moments of Grace”? I can think of two ways. One is to set aside a little time each day for prayer. During this time, we open our hearts to God and invite Him to enter. Another way is to open our hearts to others in loving service...to be merciful to others as our Father is merciful to us...especially during this “*Jubilee Year of Mercy*”.

What I experienced in that young girl’s room, and what happened to Peter, James and John on that mountain top, is something that God wants to happen to all of us. It is a gift that God wants to give us, and will give us, if we but open our hearts in prayer to God and make ourselves available to be merciful as our Heavenly Father is merciful.

In a few moments as we continue with our celebration, we too will be invited to experience a moment of grace as we come forward to this table to be one with the Lord in the Eucharist. I hope that it will be a life-changing moment for most, if not for all. Every time we come to this table to receive the real presence of Christ, if we are not changed, then we have missed the point. The boat has sailed without us. That moment of grace has passed us by. After receiving the Word of God and the Body of Christ, we must now go out into that world and be what we have just received. ***We must believe what we receive and we must become what we believe.***

By our lives and our actions, we must invite those who do not believe, to believe; and those who have wandered away, to come home. Let us ask our Heavenly Father to come into our lives and heal the wounds of our broken hearts. Let us ask Him to give us eyes of faith to see His glory and hearts of courage to bring His glory in all that we say and do. Let us ask Him that, during times of doubt, we will be graced to feel His presence and be cured of our spiritual blindness so that we will see and recognize the true Light of the World. And as always, as we continue to labor in the Lord’s vineyard as faithful disciples, let us ask Him to guide our thoughts, our feelings, and our actions.

That moment on the mountain strengthened the faith of Peter, James and John in a remarkable way. It was a moment they never forgot as long as they lived. Years later, Peter recalled that moment this way in one of his letters. He wrote: “*We had been eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received honor and glory from God the Father when that unique*

declaration came to Him from the majestic glory, 'This is my Son....' We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven while we were with Him on the holy mountain." The Lord went up a mountain and was transfigured. A short time later, He was raised on a Cross, and we are transformed. If we open our hearts to the Lord, and if we accept the invitation that God extends to us in today's Gospel, then we too can expect to hear the words that the disciples heard on the mountain: "This is my Son"... "This is my daughter"...and we will truly experience a moment of grace.

The Lord is on watch. He is always near. The Lord is my Shepherd. I walk with no fear.

From me and my family to you and yours, I wish you all a Most Spiritual and Blessed Lenten Season. May God bless each and every one of you!

