

Homily for February 28, 2010 (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent, C)  
*Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18; Ps. 27; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 9:28b-36*

I began this homily 35,000 feet in the air in route from Detroit to Atlanta. It was the first leg of a journey that would ultimately take me to Cartago, Costa Rica to plan a meeting of Capuchin friars in the Americas in September 2011 to address the challenging issue of immigration in this hemisphere.

Because I fly so much, I had received a free upgrade to Business Class. After years of flying in coach, life in “the forward cabin” was a revelation! Each of us were treated to our own “pod,” complete with an entertainment system featuring satellite TV, unlimited drinks and snacks from the flight attendants, internet access, and seats that had seven buttons that controlled the foot and head rests, gave you a massage, and even allowed the seat to become a bed.

It was quite an experience. I found myself echoing St. Peter’s words in our gospel in a way I had never imagined: “Master, it is good that we are here!”

Then we landed. Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson Airport is among the busiest in the world; and after a walk of about fifteen minutes to the area near my connecting flight, I had a three-hour layover. I got on the plane from Atlanta to San Jose, Costa Rica...and we were delayed about half an hour due to mechanical problems. I wasn’t on the mountain anymore!

Our lives have many different “moments on the mountain,” those times when we experience joy, wonder, awe, excitement, and mystery just as the disciples did at the Transfiguration of the Lord: a wedding day or graduation; standing before a vast and starlit sky; watching a thunderstorm roll across the plain; having a half-court or mid-field seat for the championship game; getting a new job or promotion; or beholding the ultrasound image of a child in the womb.

So, too, do we experience the times when what happened “on the mountain” is just a memory: when the honeymoon is over and we have to deal with the ups and downs and routines of married life; when the diploma is on the wall and we are still looking for a job; when we’re driving through the grey slush that all-too-quickly seems to follow the pristine beauty of a fresh snowfall; when our team suffers a devastating loss so soon after a thrilling victory; and when that innocent child in the womb has become a teen-ager with “issues.”

Those are the times when it does *not* seem “good that we are here.” Those are the times when we pray with the psalmist: “Hear, O Lord, the sound of my call; have pity on me and answer me....You are my helper: cast me not off.”

The good news that the scriptures give us today is that *God is with us through all of it*, whether we’re high on the mountains, low in the valleys, or making our way through the plains; whether we’re in first class, coach, or at the gate enduring another delay. God has promised it!

In our first reading, we witnessed the covenant that God made with Abraham, our ancestor in the faith. The ritual that marked this occasion was called “cutting the covenant,” and as we saw from Abraham’s sacrifices that is literally what he did. Sr. Diane Bergant, CSA, an Old Testament scholar, notes that this action was a very dramatic way of symbolizing the curse that would befall anyone who broke such a covenant. It was their way of saying, “If anyone breaks this solemn obligation, may they become like these animals!”

God and Abraham weren’t playing; and while the descendants of Abraham and Sarah broke that covenant in various ways over the centuries—sometimes to their great suffering—God remained ever faithful. That fidelity was underscored in the person and mission of Jesus; and it was ultimately confirmed on the cross.

It is important to remember that Jesus’ Transfiguration before Peter, James and John on the mountain came right after Peter’s confession that Jesus was the Christ and the Lord’s first prediction of his passion, death and resurrection (Luke 9:19-27). He had brought them into the valley; and now he was bringing them up the mountain, trying to strengthen them for the rest of the journey on the plain and some even deeper and darker valleys ahead.

The Lord does the same for us as a church through the Liturgical Year. Our annual pilgrimage through the valleys of Advent and Lent lead us to the “mountaintop” seasons of Christmas and especially Easter. Mirroring life for most of us, however, we spend nearly two-thirds of the church year moving through the plains of Ordinary Time. “Thus recalling the mysteries of redemption,” the Second Vatican Council proclaimed in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, “she [the Church] opens up to the faithful the riches of her Lord’s powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present for all time; the faithful lay hold of them and are filled with grace” (102).

The reality, though, is that we don’t always appreciate or lay hold of the Lord’s powers and merits, even though they are ever-present and available to us. This can happen when we find ourselves “in the valley,” but it can happen just as easily when we find ourselves “on the mountain.” St. Paul had to contend with just such a community in the early church at Philippi.

Infected with the Gnostic heresy, they had embraced a dualism that allowed them to compartmentalize their lives. Considering themselves spiritually enlightened and already saved, they continued to live in self-indulgent and sinful ways. They had forgotten that the Christ who had saved them did it on the cross—as one of us—and had called for disciples and all who would follow them to be holy and whole: committed to God in mind, spirit *and* body.

His exhortation for them to “stand firm in the Lord” is our call, too. We can respond in faith, knowing that God already stands firm with us—on the mountains, in the valleys, and everywhere in between...even on the cross. +