

HOMILY ~ SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

MARCH 4/5, 2023

How is your Lent going?

Less than two weeks ago, we marched out into the world with ashes on our brows, determined to do good and be better — to pray more, to give up those things we love, to be more charitable, more loving, more generous. Of course, by now, it hasn't always worked out that way. The first idealistic rush of Ash Wednesday has given way to chocolate cravings, caffeine withdrawal and the desire to scream at everyone on Facebook. Old habits die hard. Holiness, for most of us, remains elusive.

But at just the right moment, the Church gives us this remarkable Gospel, one with a powerful lesson for Lent — and for living. It couldn't have come at a better time. We find ourselves on a mountaintop with Peter, James and John, where we have been led by Jesus to witness something astonishing — the only event of its kind recorded in the Gospels, the Transfiguration.

In the midst of a mystery, overwhelmed by something beyond imagining, a transcendent moment of grace, Peter has a brainstorm: *"You know what this needs? Tents! I'm going to set up three tents!"* Peter does what so many of us do: he falls into his default position of needing to be busy, needing to feel constructive, needing to do something, anything, to be helpful. It's a very human response.

Face it: Our days are measured by deadlines, projects, appointments, paperwork, obligations. Life makes demands. This time of year, we have taxes to pay and forms to file. For a lot of us, Lent becomes an afterthought. We're enjoying that slice of pepperoni pizza and thinking, *"Wait. Is today Friday?"* And, what's worse, we can easily neglect our prayer life.

I met a deacon candidate a while back who told me the great challenge of his formation has been to do less and pray more. *"I'm used to praying with my hands, doing things,"* he told me. *"I've had to learn to be still. And just listen."*

Be still. Listen.

That is God's lesson to Peter — and to us. God responds to Peter's proposal with this simple command: *"This is my beloved Son...listen to him."* Forget the tents. Forget what you think you should be doing. Stop. Make of this moment a prayer. And listen.

What does Peter hear? When he listens, Jesus's first words tell us all we need to know, all we need to embrace during Lent. It is one of the great recurring messages of the Gospels.

"Rise and do not be afraid."

Rise. Rise from uncertainty and fear. Rise from timidity and sin. Rise from indifference. Face what you do not know. Look into the future. And do not be afraid. Consider what this means for all of us on our Lenten journey. Christ tells us: Do not be afraid of leaving your comfort zone. Do not be afraid of what you don't know or understand.

Do not be afraid of examining your heart.
Do not be afraid of admitting your mistakes, confessing your sins.
Do not be afraid of being vulnerable.
Do not be afraid of giving, of praying, of sacrificing.
Do not be afraid of surrendering your life to God.
Do not be afraid of loving.

Of going against the tide.
Of taking the time, as that deacon candidate said, to be still.
And to listen. Truly listen.

What is God calling us to do during these 40 days?

He's not waiting for us to build tents. In fact, it can be a healthy exercise to ask ourselves: *What are the tents that are distracting us from drawing closer to the mystery of God's love? What are the things that are getting in the way? What are we using as excuses?*

Whatever is holding us back, or keeping us down, the message we hear today, at this still-early part of Lent, offers us a kind of spiritual pep talk, words of inspiration to push us further along for these 40 days: *"Rise. And do not be afraid."* It's the same message contained in the reading from Genesis we heard a few moments ago. The very first words are God's admonition to Abram — and to us.

"Go forth."

Go where you have never been, and something great will happen. *Rise and do not be afraid.*

As we continue our journey this Lent, walking a road that takes us from the desert, to a mountaintop and ultimately to Calvary with Jesus, we need to carry those words with us. Words of consolation, mission, and hope. God is calling us to something wondrous. Lent — this opportunity to pray, give alms and fast — is the path to help get us there.

As we heard on Ash Wednesday, now is an acceptable time. Now is our moment to extend ourselves and, in our own way, be transfigured — to strive to become more like Christ.

What are we waiting for? Rise and do not be afraid!

Peace,
Deacon Don