

Second Sunday of Lent, March 5, 2023

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

First Reading — Genesis 12:1-4

1Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." 4So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Responsorial Psalm PS 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22

R. (22) Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Upright is the word of the LORD, and all his works are trustworthy. He loves justice and right; of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him, upon those who hope for his kindness, To deliver them from death and preserve them in spite of famine.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Our soul waits for the LORD, who is our help and our shield. May your kindness, O LORD, be upon us who have put our hope in you.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Second Reading — 2 Timothy 1:8-10

8Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel in the power of God, 9who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, 10and now has manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Gospel Reading — Matthew 17:1-9

1And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. 2And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. 3And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking

with him. 4And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." 5He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." 6When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. 7But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." 8And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. 9And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead."

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God...

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Have you ever stopped to wonder, "What makes the holy, holy?" What is it that makes a person holy? Is it some inner goodness or merit they achieved? Most godly people would be appalled by this suggestion; rather, they are unusually conscious of their own unworthiness. And this sense of unworthiness is often offset by an unusual consciousness of being a recipient of God's mercy and grace. A story is told of a young girl, who when visiting a great cathedral, saw the figures depicted in the beautiful stained-glass windows. It was explained to her that these were the "saints" of the Church. Later, when asked by someone, "What is a saint?" she answered, "A saint is someone who lets the light shine through." Isn't that really what makes us holy, the extent to which we allow Jesus, "the Light," to shine through us? We are set apart and made spiritually beautiful, or holy, not because we reflect our own merit but because we reflect his merit. Pope John XXIII, in the biography *The Journey of a Soul*, uses two wonderful expressions to capture this same thought. The first is from St. Augustine: "When you crown our merit, you are crowning your own gifts." The second is his own thought on this concept: "My merit, your mercy." Both men understood that the goodness and essence of their spirituality was simply, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Colossians 1:27) This week's Gospel reading relates the story of Jesus and his three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. For a few short minutes these disciples visually saw that of which John the Baptist testified, the holiness of Jesus the Lamb of God. John the Baptist said, "among you stands one whom you do not know, even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." This holy light which transfigured Jesus' face and caused it to shine like the sun, was just a glimpse of his glory and holiness. This glory and holiness of Jesus Christ is the source of mercy of which Pope John XXIII spoke. As we proceed through these days of Lent, and reflect on our spiritual condition and perhaps the disarray of our relationship with Christ, it is easy to see ourselves as unholy. Often when we perceive our spiritual shortcomings we try to compensate and offset our shortcomings by renewed spiritual vigor and devout promises in an attempt to feel better about ourselves. When we respond this way we are getting the cart before the horse. The place of change and spiritual transformation begins with the recognition that we are holy, in spite of our sins, because the holiness of Jesus has been applied to our lives. God sees us as righteous through the righteousness of his Son. Pope John Paul II says in *Mission of the Redeemer*, "... we must first clearly affirm our faith in Christ, the one Savior of humanity, a faith we have received as a gift from on high, not as a result of any merit of our own. We say with Paul, 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith' (Rom 1:16). " When we are able by faith to grasp that concept we respond back to God in love, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:14, "the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore, all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." This is how transformation takes place. With this understanding of Christ's love for us and our resolve to live for him with renewed spiritual vigor, comes not from a desire to offset our previous sins but out of gratitude that our sins have been forgiven. That which makes the holy, holy, is simply the presence of Jesus, the "Light of the World," dwelling within us. His merit, his gifts shining through us, transforms our attitudes and behavior.

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INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

First Reading —

1. How would you respond if you were called from your family, friends, and country to follow God?

Second Reading —

2. In this explanation of our calling, which actions are God's, and which actions are ours?
3. What do you think sometimes causes timidity and embarrassment within us when we have an opportunity to speak to someone about Christ?

Gospel Reading —

4. How do you think you would have responded in this situation if you were there with the disciples?
5. What are the messages of this transfiguration experience, and what are their meanings?
6. To what extent do you believe that Jesus is calling you to come apart from your busy activities to behold him?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with a final prayer.