

Second Sunday of Lent
February 21, 2016

Our first reading from Genesis places us in the middle of a very strange scene. A scene that won't make any sense to our 21st century world unless we make ourselves **familiar** with the some of the customs and usages of the ancient world.

This extraordinary ceremony was a common ritual that was symbolic of a covenant or a solemn promise between two people. The two parties to the covenant would walk down the avenue between the halves of the animals. For them, the meaning was obvious – “If I break this covenant then let happen to me what has happened to these animals, may I also be severed in two.”

So, what happened between God and Abraham was an event unprecedented in the history of the world till that point: God himself stooped down to enter a Covenant relationship with Abraham using the same common ritual that people had long used among themselves.

We're given this incident from the Old Testament to help us interpret the Gospel account of the Transfiguration *and* by placing these two events together we recognize the continuity that exists between the Old and the New Covenants.

Inquiring minds may even wonder why the Gospel reading about the Transfiguration is given to us in Lent when it already has its own special day in the liturgical calendar on August 6th.

Well there's a clue in the opening line, although unfortunately in the text we're given in today's gospel reading, the first half of verse 28 is omitted.

What we heard was: *[Jesus] took Peter and John and James and went up the mountain to pray.* But the entire text of verse 28 says: *'Now about eight days after this had been said, he [Jesus] took Peter and John and James and went up the mountain to pray.'*

This actually introduces several interesting connections between our first reading and the Gospel. The "what had been said" was Peter's Confession that Jesus was the Son of God followed by the first of three predictions of Christ's Passion.

Now we know that the first covenant with Abraham was sealed in the blood of a heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtledove and a young pigeon. But Peter's confession tells us that the New Covenant is going to be sealed in the blood of Jesus.

The presence of Moses and Elijah also confirms that the New Covenant is an extension and fulfillment of the Old.

So how does all of this unpacking of the historical and religious meaning of these two events have any bearing on us?

Well, the story of Abraham shows us that the appropriate response to these events is faith. And God counted it as an act of righteousness. Abraham gave God space to work with the emptiness in his life, and that was all he needed. The same is true for

us. Lent is the perfect time to give God some space to work on the emptiness of our lives.

And then the more we reflect on the Transfiguration, the more we realize that each of us are given an opportunity to see our lives in a completely new way.

Thomas Merton once said, "Life is this simple: we are living in a world that is transparent and the divine is shining through it all the time." If we can see it.

Unfortunately, like the apostles in today's Gospel, we are often asleep.

Consequently, we tend to miss the clues, the hints, the suggestions that something wonderful is happening that is beyond our everyday recognition, Something that is way more than what meets the eye.

This is what Lent is really all about: It's a time to sharpen our inner eyes so that we can better see the "holy ground" in our lives. It's a time to ask: What if?

What if we can be truly transfigured?