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Experiences of God's Presence

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Experiences of God's Presence

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Second Sunday of Lent

February 24, 2013 Sunday Readings for Cycle C:

Gn 15:5-12, 17-18; Ps 27; Phil 3:17-4:1; Lk 9:28-36

EXPERIENCES OF GOD'S PRESENCE

Lawrence E. Frizzell

All aspects of our worship throughout the year are intended to lead us into deeper communion with God, to prepare the Church and each of her members to share in Christ's triumph over death. The readings on the first Sunday of Lent point to the Passover Meal and to the death of Jesus in Jerusalem. The second Sunday anticipates the joy of Jesus' resurrection as the basis for our assurance of the fullness of life in eternal communion with the Father and in the Holy Spirit. "We have our citizenship in heaven; from here we eagerly await the coming of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:20).

Every experience of our eternal destiny is based upon God's call and free gift in the Covenant. "From the dawn of the chosen people's history, Abraham is depicted as being called to leave his country, his family and his father's house, while the Apostle (St. Paul) repeatedly teaches that the same calling was the beginning of a long mystical journey to a homeland which is not of this world" (Sacred Congregation for Religious, *Instruction* of August 15, 1969). The poignancy of Abraham and Sarah's hope for a child draws attention to the community dimension of the Covenant. When God reassured Abraham that the divine promise would be fulfilled, he "put his faith in the Lord, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness" (Gn 15:6). This belief in God's word led Abraham to prepare sacrificial offerings. He cut the animals in half and laid them so that there was a path between them. He knew that in a treaty or covenant ceremony the weaker or subordinate party would walk between the pieces and recite an oath: "This is what will happen to me if I break the terms of the treaty" (see Jer 34:18). But Abraham fell asleep and realized that *God* passed between the pieces! Such was the irrevocable commitment that God made with the chosen people, with the promise of a land wherein they would be free to serve him. The first level of the divine plan was completed as Israel was rescued from Egyptian slavery and convoked at Mount Sinai to become a nation.

Again God would manifest the divine presence to Moses and to the entire people of Israel (Ex 19:20 and 24). Centuries later, when Elijah despaired of his fate as a prophet, God called him to Sinai (also known as Mount Horeb) to strengthen his commitment (see 1 Kg 19:8-18).

The evangelists remark frequently that Jesus spent hours in deep prayer; on two occasions the three "favorite" disciples were invited to participate in this experience. The Transfiguration was meant to prepare them so that their faith would stand the shock of Gethsemane and the crucifixion.

The first three Gospels state that Moses and Elijah appeared and conversed with Jesus. They knew the God of Abraham at Sinai so were credible witnesses that Jesus was to continue and

fulfill the covenant. What did they discuss? St. Luke satisfies something of our curiosity. "They appeared in glory and spoke of his *exodus* (passage) which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem" (9:31).

Do you recall sleeping through a significant event? The Apostles cannot remain alert, either here or at Gethsemane. However, they awakened in time to realize that *they* were taken into the mystery of God's presence (symbolized by the cloud). Then they heard the most important testimony: "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him!" (9:35).

"The Church professes that all of Christ's faithful, who as people of faith are children of Abraham, are included in the same patriarch's call and that the salvation of the Church is prefigured mystically in the exodus of God's chosen people from the land of bondage" (Vatican II, *Declaration on Non-Christian Religions* #4). These themes will return often as the Church leads us into Holy Week and the Paschal Vigil. The challenge is to watch and pray. This year we hope to be more alert and appreciative of the gifts of faith!