March 16, 2014

Faith in Moments of Darkness

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Second Sunday of Lent
Sunday Readings for March 16, 2014 for Cycle A:
Gn 12:1-4; Ps 33:3-4, 18-22; 2 Tim 1:8-10; Mt 17:1-911

FAITH IN MOMENTS OF DARKNESS

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The texts that the Church has chosen from Genesis and Matthew's Gospel seem to complement each other, while reminding us that the work of Jesus continues the divine plan that began with the call of Abram. Does some aspect of our life seem to thrust us into the unknown? If God's will may at times seem obscure to us, consider the elderly couple Abram and Sarai! God invited them to leave their homeland and its security for a destination that would be shown to them only at a later date. The promise of a great name and destiny comes to us as well; however, we know that the name is Christian and the goal is union with God the Father through Jesus. The content of our faith is much more complete than theirs. So that we will not grow discouraged in our pilgrimage, the Gospel offers a glimpse of Jesus in his risen glory.

To face suffering and the mystery of death, we need to prevent the vision of faith from growing dim. So Jesus took the three disciples who would be close to him in Gethsemani to a high mountain where they received a luminous insight into his majesty. The vision was interpreted by the Father's commendatory message: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (Mt 17:5).

The account of the Transfiguration in the Gospels states that Moses and Elijah appeared and conversed with Jesus. From the time of Origen in the third century, scholars understood these great leaders of Israel to represent "the Law and the Prophets", two of the three components of the Hebrew Scriptures. This interpretation is incorporated into the preface of this Sunday. While it is true that the totality of the Scriptures bears witness to God's plan in the work of Jesus (see Lk 24:44), Moses and Elijah serve another purpose as well. They both experienced the God of Israel on the height of Mount Sinai (also known as Horeb). Moses is the great prophet of ancient Israel and Elijah was like him in many ways, so they should be seen as the great teachers of unwavering fidelity to God's will who were introduced into the divine mystery in a very profound manner (see Ex 33:7-34:9 and 1 Kgs 19:9-18). Who would be better witnesses to the identity of Jesus?

In the Scriptures the cloud is often a symbol of God's presence, appropriate because it is visible yet impenetrable. The apostles are drawn under the protective shadow of this cloud and are overawed by the voice of the Father. As yet they are unaware that they will be called as well to stand in the shadow of the cross. Would they recall this privileged moment as they were invited to join Jesus at prayer in the garden? The evangelists give no indication of this; they would understand the meaning of the Transfiguration and Gethsemani only after the Son of Man was raised from the dead. During the agony and trials of Jesus they did not perceive the light of the resurrection nor remember the transfiguration. Again, for the moment, the content of our faith is
more complete than theirs.