

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Wait till all are settled, then announce that the "Lord" appeared to Abraham.

Terebinth = TAYR-uh-binth

Mamre = MAHM-ray

Narrate from Abraham's point of view: At first, he has no idea who the three are, but then senses the presence of divinity.

Note that he addresses the visitors in the singular.

He indicates that he will make little fuss, but then goes overboard.

"Do as you have said," should convey pleasure and gratitude.

His instructions to Sarah should convey a desire to serve rather than to impress his guests.

Slow the pace here to indicate his ability to focus on and be present to the guests.

READING I The opening sentence in the first reading tells us that the Lord appeared to Abraham, although Abraham himself does not know the identity of his three visitors. Our knowing that the Lord is present in disguise creates a sense of mystery and raises questions as the story unfolds. Is only one of the visitors the Lord in human guise, with two attendants? Or are the three so closely united that in addressing one of them, Abraham is addressing all three? Such questions have intrigued both Jewish and Christian interpreters through the centu-

LECTIONARY #108

READING I Genesis 18:1-10a

A reading from the Book of Genesis

The LORD appeared to Abraham by the terebinth of Mamre, as he sat in the entrance of his tent, while the day was growing hot.

Looking up, Abraham saw three men standing nearby.

When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them;

and bowing to the ground, he said:

"Sir, if I may ask you this favor, please do not go on past your servant.

Let some water be brought, that you may bathe your feet, and then rest yourselves under the tree.

Now that you have come this close to your servant,

let me bring you a little food, that you may refresh yourselves; and afterward you may go on your way."

The men replied, "Very well, do as you have said."

Abraham hastened into the tent and told Sarah, "Quick, three measures of fine flour! Knead it and make rolls."

He ran to the herd, picked out a tender, choice steer, and gave it to a servant, who quickly prepared it.

Then Abraham got some curds and milk, as well as the steer that had been prepared,

ries, leading to a variety of explanations. One Christian understanding sees the three visitors as representative of the Holy Trinity, expressed beautifully in the well-known icon by Andrei Rublev.

The story itself leaves such questions unanswered and in the realm of mystery. The narrative focuses instead on the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promise that Abraham would be the father of a multitude. In this scene, Abraham asks his visitors to favor him by not passing by, by resting and sharing in a "little food." What Abraham, Sarah, and their servant provide

is far more than a "little food," but is an extravagant feast. The abundance offered by Abraham and Sarah is more than matched by the wondrous favor that the Lord in disguise offers them. One of the visitors tells Abraham that by the same time the next year, Sarah, well past child-bearing age, will have a son. The divine promise will be fulfilled.

READING II Our second reading, from Colossians, begins with a profound paradox: Paul rejoices in his sufferings. As he writes this letter, Paul is in

Don't rush this question.

This is the great promise that will be fulfilled in Isaac.

For meditation and context:

Colossians = kuh-LOSH-uhnz

Read slowly because you are saying something surprising—that he “rejoices” in “suffering.”

It will take a homilist’s insight to clarify the meaning of this assertion, but if you don’t ensure that they *hear* it, there won’t be anything for him to clarify.

Paul is asserting his rightful role as apostle and servant of the Gospel.

Speak with joy of this mystery that has now been made known.

prison, and he asks the community “Remember my chains” (4:18). Whether imprisonment or other myriad hardships that Paul endured (e.g., 2 Corinthians 11:23ff.), he tells the community at Colossae that it is “for your sake,” and “on behalf of his body, which is the Church.” Paul is participating in Christ’s own suffering as a minister (*diakonos*) of the Gospel, putting his entire life at the service of his brothers and sisters in the faith. Such participation in Christ’s own suffering is cause for Paul’s joy.

and set these before the three men;
and he waited on them under the tree while they ate.

They asked Abraham, “Where is your wife Sarah?”

He replied, “There in the tent.”

One of them said, “I will surely return to you
about this time next year,
and Sarah will then have a son.”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 15:2–3, 3–4, 5 (1a)

R. He who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

One who walks blamelessly and does justice;
who thinks the truth in his heart
and slanders not with his tongue.

Who lends not his money at usury
and accepts no bribe against the innocent.
One who does these things
shall never be disturbed.

Who harms not his fellow man,
nor takes up a reproach against his
neighbor;

by whom the reprobate is despised,
while he honors those who fear the LORD.

READING II Colossians 1:24–28

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians

Brothers and sisters:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake,
and in my flesh I am filling up
what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ
on behalf of his body, which is the church,
of which I am a minister
in accordance with God’s stewardship given to me
to bring to completion for you the word of God,
the mystery hidden from ages and from generations past. >>

As Paul suffers for the sake of his fellow believers, he fills up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions. Since Christ has died once for all (see Romans 6:10), how can Christ’s sufferings be incomplete? Paul explains that Christ’s suffering continues in his body, the Church. Paul is both a member of that body and a minister to it, exercising stewardship over the household of the faith.

In his ministry of stewardship, Paul brings the word of God to the community, announces the hidden mystery to them, makes the Gospel known, admonishes, and

teaches everyone. Paul proclaims “Christ in you,” the abiding presence of the risen one, giving each member of the body hope for glory. Even if Paul’s present reality, as well as that of the community, entails suffering, Christ’s dwelling in them is a gift now as well as a pledge for future glory, as they are being perfected, or brought to completion, in Christ.

GOSPEL

The story of the two sisters Martha and Mary is often understood as contrasting the contemplative and active lifestyles. Origen (185–254)

What has been “made known” to the Gentiles is the reality of Christ’s oneness with his body, the Church.

Through you, Paul is proclaiming Christ anew! Stress the verbs “admonishing” and “teaching” and save the stress on “everyone” until the end.

You’re telling a story, and the setting and character names are important. Don’t rush.

Let your tone convey the unusual nature of Mary’s choice and stress her *listening*.

Martha is “burdened.” Your tone should convey the negative judgment Jesus will make about her state of mind and heart.

She speaks to him familiarly, like a member of the family.

Remarkably, she tells Jesus what to do.

Jesus seems mildly amused by her consternation.

Though he loves her, Jesus is clear with Martha about what is the *better* part.

But **now** it has been **manifested** to his **holy ones**,
to whom **God** chose to make **known** the **riches** of the **glory**
of this **mystery** among the **Gentiles**;
it is **Christ** in you, the **hope** for glory.
It is **he** whom we **proclaim**,
admonishing everyone and **teaching everyone**
with **all wisdom**,
that we may **present everyone perfect** in **Christ**.

GOSPEL Luke 10:38–42

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

Jesus entered a village
where a woman whose name was **Martha** welcomed him.
She had a **sister** named **Mary**
who sat **beside** the **Lord** at his feet **listening** to him speak.
Martha, **burdened** with much **servicing**, came to him and **said**,
“**Lord**, do you not **care**
that my **sister** has left me by **myself** to do the **servicing**?
Tell her to help me.”
The **Lord** said to her in **reply**,
“**Martha**, **Martha**, you are **anxious** and **worried**
about **many things**.
There is need of **only one** thing.
Mary has chosen the **better part**
and it will **not be taken** from her.”

was widely influential in promoting this view by writing, “One may confidently affirm that Martha symbolizes action, Mary contemplation.” In spite of Origen’s confident interpretation, Luke may have had something else in mind.

Both Martha and Mary can be counted among Jesus’ disciples. In this scene, Jesus gives advice to Martha, as he had done to other disciples, lest she center her attention on the wrong things. His admonition to her is important for all disciples. She is anxious about many things, while her sister is

attentive to only one: Jesus himself. Jesus is not denigrating active service (*diakonia*), but cautions about anxiety and worry. Martha’s fretfulness brings to mind Jesus’ parable about a seed falling among thorns, symbolic of people choked by the anxieties of life (8:14). The seed, according to the parable, is the Word of God that disciples should embrace with generous and good hearts, a stance seen in Mary listening at Jesus’ feet. Later in the Gospel, Jesus tells his followers that they shouldn’t worry about what to say in their defense, for the Holy Spirit will teach

them (12:11–12). Like Mary, they need to listen to hear God’s Spirit.

Because Jesus is well aware of the demands of service for the sake of the Gospel and the anxieties that often accompany it, he tells his disciples, including Martha, to keep their attention on Jesus even in the midst of their activity. The one thing necessary is to embrace the word of God, Jesus himself, with a generous and good heart. E.P.