

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Genesis = JEN-uh-sihs

Abram = AY-br*m

The tone of this reading is commanding. God is speaking to Abram as if to all his people.

Though not emphasized, the repetition of "I will" guides this reading. These are promises God is making for the future of his people.

For meditation and context:

LECTIONARY #25

READING I Genesis 12:1-4a

A reading from the Book of Genesis

The LORD said to Abram:

"Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you.

"I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you;

I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you.

All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you."

Abram went as the LORD directed him.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22 (22)

R. 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.

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.

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.

READING I

The readings for this Second Sunday of Lent focus on God's invitation to enter into relationship with God and humans' response of trust in the covenant.

Today's first reading is one of three accounts of the covenant that God made with Abram. The other two accounts are Genesis 15 and Genesis 17:1-21. Each is interesting in its own right, but together they paint a rich and vibrant picture of Abram's relationship with God. It is in the last of these three accounts that God changes Abram's name to Abraham, mean-

ing "father of nations." But in this first account we hear today, we learn of God's invitation to Abram to leave his family and homeland to migrate to Shechem in the land of Canaan, which is in the central part of the West Bank today. Later he would migrate to the Negev in southern Israel.

Tradition tells us that he was living in Haran (in modern southeastern Turkey) at the time, but his original homeland was Ur of the Chaldees (in southern Iraq today). These are extremely long distances to travel on foot and with all their flocks and other belongings, especially when the com-

mand from a God that he does not yet know is so vague: "Go . . . to a land that I will show you."

This same God bestows a series of blessings on Abram. Some biblical scholars argue, based on the Hebrew text, that there are seven, but the English translation makes it hard to enumerate them exactly. Why seven? Seven is a perfect number representing wholeness or fullness. God also gives two promises: multitudes of descendants and possession of the land. Constructing altars to the God who appeared

Beloved = bee-LUHV-uhd or buh-LUHV-uhd

The tone of this reading to Timothy, a personal addressee rather than the collective membership of one of the early Christian churches, is intimate and tender.

Slight pause between "grace" and "bestowed."

Slight pause between "savior" and "Christ Jesus."

"Transfigured" focuses this reading, sets its tone. This is a celestial event.

Moses = MOH-zihz or MOH-zihz

Elijah = ee-Lī-juh

Initially, the appearance of Moses and Elijah intensifies the focus.

But then Peter humanizes things in his desire to set up a shrine.

to Abram indicates that he acknowledges God as having authority in that land.

READING II Our second reading is from the Second Letter to Timothy. Timothy is presented as a companion of Paul in his missionary activity and later the pastor of a Church in Ephesus. The letter is attributed to Paul, though biblical scholars mostly agree that it was written after Paul's death, perhaps as late as AD 100. While this might seem strange to us today, it was not unusual for disciples of a great teacher to write in the name of their

READING II 2 Timothy 1:8b–10

A reading from the second Letter of Saint Paul to Timothy

Beloved:

Bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God.

He saved us and called us to a holy life,
not according to our works
but according to his own design
and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before
time began,
but now made manifest
through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus,
who destroyed death and brought life and immortality
to light through the gospel.

GOSPEL Matthew 17:1–9

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother,
and led them up a high mountain by themselves.
And he was transfigured before them;
his face shone like the sun
and his clothes became white as light.
And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them,
conversing with him.
Then Peter said to Jesus in reply,
"Lord, it is good that we are here.
If you wish, I will make three tents here,
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." >>

honored one in order to extend his message to another generation.

This reading picks up a theme that we find in Paul's authentic letters, namely, enduring suffering for the sake of the Gospel. The sentence that immediately precedes today's reading is "So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for his sake" (2 Timothy 1:8; see also Romans 1:16). Using the phrase "the strength that comes from God," the author of this letter goes on to give a rationale for not being ashamed of

suffering for Christ and trusting in God's power to protect oneself.

GOSPEL In today's Gospel reading, we hear the magnificent story of Jesus' transfiguration. The narrator describes Jesus as taking his inner circle of disciples—Peter, James, and John—and going up a mountain. These same disciples will be with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives before he is arrested (Matthew 26:36–46).

Mountains were thought to be places of divine revelation. In Matthew's Gospel,

At "behold," the focus shifts back to a heavenly perspective that overwhelms the earthly perspective.

Even emphasis on "very much afraid."

The mystery of this final command of Jesus is worth lingering over as you conclude your proclamation.

While he was **still speaking, behold,**
a **bright cloud** cast a **shadow** over them,
then from the **cloud** came a **voice** that said,
"**This** is my beloved **Son**, with **whom** I am well **pleased**;
listen to him."

When the **disciples heard** this, they fell **prostrate**
and were **very much afraid**.

But **Jesus** came and **touch**ed them, saying,
"**Rise**, and do **not** be **afraid**."

And when the disciples **raised** their **eyes**,
they saw **no one else** but **Jesus** alone.

As they were **coming down** from the **mountain**,
Jesus charged them,
"**Do not tell** the **vision** to **anyone**
until the **Son of Man** has been **raised** from the **dead**."

this mountain is unnamed. Most biblical scholars think it is a symbol of Mount Sinai, because of the two figures who appear with Jesus. When Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the words of God's covenant, Moses' face became radiant with light (Exodus 34:27–35). Here, too, Jesus' face shines like the sun and his clothes become brilliant white. Likewise, Elijah was given the privilege of experiencing God in "a light silent sound" when he was on Mount Sinai, and he hides his face (1 Kings 19:9–13). Here, too, Jesus' disciples hide their faces. Peter's offer to build tents for

Jesus, Elijah, and Moses suggests the Feast of Tabernacles, also called *Sukkot* or Booths, which is a reminder of the time that the Israelites spent dwelling in tents during the Exodus.

What a marvelous experience for these three disciples. Suddenly they see a shining cloud overhead. It is the *shekinah*, the glory of God's presence, which led the Israelites out of the wilderness in cloud and fire, and which fills the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple. And they hear a voice from the heavens, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to

him." A voice from the heavens had a similar message at Jesus' baptism, when God's Spirit descended upon him like a dove (Matthew 3:13–17). They are so awestruck by the heavenly voice that they prostrate themselves in reverence. Suddenly, the vision passes, and they see only Jesus standing before them. Although some biblical scholars interpret this scene to be a preview of the resurrection, it is first and foremost a theophany, a manifestation of the divine Jesus, the Son of God. C.C.