

Call of Abraham
2nd Sunday of Lent (A)
(Gn 12:1-4)

With the calling of Abraham (first reading), God begins a new chapter in the story of salvation. Up until then, God was dealing with the effects of Original Sin, and the spread of evil through the whole world, since the time of the Fall. But with Abraham, God begins the process by which He will save the world. God had just scattered the nations and confused their tongues at Babel, but now, through Abraham, God promises that all nations will be blessed. From Abraham, God will form a holy nation, from which the Savior will come, and on which all the nations will be grafted.

God begins by calling Abraham “back from the east,” back to the Holy Land. Abraham’s fathers are living in Ur of the Chaldeas, but they must go to the place where God will ultimately save the world, to the land where the Messiah will be born, and where he will undo the sin of Adam on the Cross at Mt Zion.

This immigration of Abraham to the Holy Land across the desert will later be echoed in the time of Moses, when the young nation of Israel must leave Egypt and cross the desert back to the Promised Land. It is echoed today in our holy season of Lent, when God calls the Church to return to Him with all our hearts, entering the desert through fasting and sacrifice, and leaving behind the sins which banish us from His presence.

Sin “banishes us from the face of God” (Gn 4:14-16), cuts us off from grace, and leaves us cursed to die. Because of sin we end up living in a “foreign land,” living according to the flesh and according to the world, in a condition of exile. Just like the Prodigal Son, we are far from our true Father, and far from our true dignity as His children.

Thus the calling of Abraham, and Moses, and the Prodigal Son, to get up and leave, and return to our true land, our true home, is the theme of Lent. Repenting in dust and ashes, we undertake the practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, giving up the ways of the world which trap and enslave us in desires of the flesh.

This journey is demanding, with sacrifices and hardships. Lent is meant to be difficult, and uncomfortable. The goal is *not* to return to our former practices at Easter, once the 40 days are over, but to be in a completely different place by Easter, *never* to return to the former ways.

But there is a great grace given to those who set out wholeheartedly on this Exodus, are ready to seek the Lord by leaving behind the “world.” This is the grace of *theophany*, the grace of encountering God on the mountain. Abraham met and spoke with God. Moses also met and spoke with God in the desert, on the

mountain. And for those who follow Christ, turning from sin and believing the Gospel, we too will meet God in the mountain of the Transfiguration.

The mountain is not for those who have not entered the desert or left the world of sin yet. The first step is repentance and conversion – the desert. It is not possible to ascend the mountain of God if we are still slaves under the dominion of the world. Only when we have broken with sin, and left behind “Ur of the Chaldeas,” or “Egypt,” will God invite us to fellowship with Himself on the mountain. Spiritual writers speak about the “Way of Purification” as a necessary precondition for the “Way of Union.”

In the life of Church, Baptism and the Sacrament of Penance dispose us for Confirmation and the Sacrament of the Eucharist. We may not approach the Sacrament of Holy Communion if we are guilty of sin. We may not approach Holy Communion, if we did not fast and pray beforehand. We may not approach the Eucharist, if we did not go to Confession for any mortal sins, or experience the Penitential Rite at the beginning of Mass for any venial sins. We will not be able to truly celebrate Easter, if we have not celebrated Lent.

God personally called Abraham to leave behind his foreign land and discover his true home; Jesus personally invited Peter, James, and John to ascend the mountain and experience the “Father’s House” (where Peter wanted to set up tents and stay); and God is calling us today to a deeper communion with Himself in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

During this Holy Season of Lent, let us not only prepare our hearts for God by entering the desert and turning away from sin. Let us seek His Face by ascending the mountain and entering deeply into the Scriptural conversation of His love.