

**Second Sunday of Lent – Year A  
(Mar. 20, 2011)**

**Letting Go**

Reading our scripture passages for today, I was struck by a thought that has never occurred to me before, that these three readings for this second Sunday of Lent are about letting go – among other things, of course. But suddenly the idea of letting go seemed something that I really wanted to talk about today.

The call of Abraham in the first passage is very clear. God is asking him to let go of just about everything. Leave your native land, God tells him. Go to a place that I will show you. And Abraham, in an extraordinary act of faith, does it. As the author of the Letter to the Hebrews puts it, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out not knowing where he was going.”

It’s the kind of faith and trust that Mary professes when she says, “I am the servant of the Lord. Let it happen to me according to your word.” But like Abraham she did not know what that meant.

Paul, in his Letter to the Philippians, tells us that the supreme act of letting go was that of the Son of God who emptied himself, taking the condition of a slave, taking on the likeness of human beings. And being found in human form, he lowered himself further still, becoming obedient unto death, even to death on a cross. It was the ultimate form of letting go.

Peter, James, and John, who go up on a high mountain with Jesus also had to let go. A few Sundays ago we heard how Jesus called them to follow him. And Matthew in his Gospel told us that they left everything and followed him.

Well, as they accompany Jesus up that mountain, little do they realize that they are now being called upon to let go of even more.

Just before this incident we read about the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi where under divine inspiration he tells Jesus that he is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus then proceeds to tell him that the Messiah must suffer and die. But Peter will have none of that. He protests claiming that nothing of the sort can happen to Jesus. And Jesus

turns on him and says some of the harshest words he speaks in the Gospels, “Get behind me, Satan. You do not think like God.” Peter has a lot to let go of.

Several things happen on that mountain. Jesus is transfigured before them. Perhaps this was to encourage them as they struggled to face up to the difficult times ahead, including the Passion and death of Jesus. Perhaps it was meant to encourage Jesus. But we must remember that the evangelists are writing in the light of the Resurrection and that had to influence their narrative. Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus, Moses the great law-giver, and Elijah the first of the great prophets. It’s as though we are being told that Jesus embodies in himself everything that they stood for. He is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. But he is even more than that. From heaven the voice of God shouts, “This is my son, my beloved,” a confirmation that he is Messiah; then “In him I am well pleased.” This is the language Isaiah used to describe the suffering servant. So God is telling them not only is Jesus Messiah, but that he will suffer as well, something they did not want to accept.

Beyond that God says, “Listen to him.” Pay attention because as Peter admits in John’s Gospel, Jesus has the words of eternal life.

So they are being asked to let go of their prejudices, their preconceived ideas, and be open to whatever Jesus has to say to them. But for that they must listen.

I suggest that that is also how we have to approach the Lord on this second Sunday of Lent. Listen to him. Open our minds and our hearts. But of course opening our minds and hearts to God also means opening our minds and hearts to one another. Let go of prejudice and preconceived notions and learn to accept ourselves and God and others on God’s terms and not on our own.

Listen to him because Jesus is speaking to us all in many ways. Speaking to us whenever God’s word is proclaimed. It’s still true as we heard Jesus say last week, “No one lives on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Speaking to us in the events that TV broadcasts in our living rooms: continuing war in Iraq and Afghanistan; struggles for freedom in North Africa and Arab countries of the Near East; Super Bowls and Academy Awards; hunger and homelessness on the streets

of Washington. Speaking to us all through our own experiences: a newborn baby or a child with Down's Syndrome, a wedding or a funeral, hostility at home or crisis in the Church, a job you love or a job you've lost, whatever. Countless other ways every single day. It takes a great act of faith to find God speaking to us in natural disasters like the tragedy that the people of Japan are suffering, and it's easy enough for me to say that God is there. That's no comfort to the many who have lost homes and loved ones. But God *is* there, suffering along with them. We can only pray for them and do what we can to help them.

Very simply, dear friends, as we journey with Jesus to our own Jerusalem, to our own Mount of Transfiguration, listen to him. It won't always be fun and we won't always enjoy it. But it will be exciting, and it will help us to be the people we are meant to be, and in the final analysis that will be good, very good. So, listen to him and learn to let go.

And what is the best way to listen to him? Surely in prayer. Our parish is offering many prayer opportunities during this season of Lent. My own conviction is that if we listen closely we will hear God tell us to do something to help people, to show our love and our response to the Lord's command to serve the least of his brothers and sisters. Again, our parish is offering many opportunities to do this. Please consult the parish bulletin or the parish website for the many ways that each and every one of us can offer some service during this Lenten season. There is no better way to listen to him and to let go!