

Father O'Connor's Homily for 25 February 2024  
Second Sunday of Lent-B

Genesis 22: 1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18

Romans 8: 31b-34

Mark 9: 2-10

It was a rough year for a coal mining community. One miner expressed his frustration like this: "My life is filled with mountaintop experiences. One day I'm on top of the mountain. The next day the mountain is on top of me."

The Bible refers to many mountaintop experiences.

It was on Mount Moriah that Abraham believed that God was calling him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham felt at that moment that the mountain was on top of him. But when Abraham passed the test of his obedience to God, God opened his eyes to see a ram to sacrifice instead of his son, Isaac. Abraham was on top of the mountain (Genesis 22).

On Mount Sinai Moses received the Ten Commandments. But when he came down from the mountain the people were worshipping a golden calf of their own making. Now the mountain was on top of Moses (Exodus 32).

On Mount Carmel, the prophet Elijah had his great skirmish with the pagan prophets of Baal and won a spectacular victory. But soon after this, he was on the run, thanks to the wicked Queen Jezebel (I Kings 18-19).

Jesus was certainly acquainted with mountains. One of the temptations of Christ by Satan took place on a high mountain (Matthew 4: 1-11).

And then there was Jesus' own "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5-7).

It was to the Mount of Olives that Jesus sometimes went to pray. It was also the place where He was betrayed in its Garden of Gethsemane. And that led to Mount Calvary where He died for us.

Today's passage from Mark's Gospel is an ultimate mountaintop experience. Jesus took His closest friends, Peter, James and John, up Mount Tabor and was transfigured before them.

They saw a sudden change come over Jesus. As Mark tells us: "His clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them." The disciples had never seen Him like this before.

One writer has this to say: "Think of the boy down the street who used to deliver your newspapers. The one you tipped \$5 at Christmas time. The one you haven't seen for years. The one you wondered if he would ever amount to something."

“Now it is the day of your surgery and you are pleased that your doctor is one of the best in the field. He walks into your hospital room beforehand and he seems vaguely familiar. He introduces himself as your former newspaper boy. You can hardly believe that it is the same person. And then you suddenly wish that you had tipped him \$50 instead of \$5 that Christmas.”

Those three disciples saw Jesus that day as they had never seen Him before. And then Jesus is talking with Moses and Elijah. Moses gave the people the Ten Commandments and led them to the Promised Land. Elijah the Prophet was taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire. These two men, Moses and Elijah, represented the Law and the Prophets, the sources of authority in Jewish life.

Then Mark tells us: “A cloud came, casting a shadow over them. From the cloud came a voice: ‘This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.’”

That is what Jesus wants most from us, isn't it: our undivided attention.

And how does He speak to us? In many ways. In the Scriptures, “the living Word of God.” Through His Church, His Mystical Body. In His sacraments, through which His saving work is accomplished among us. In our prayer, both public and private. In so many ways, Jesus speaks to us.

What difference would it make in your life and in mine if we really tried, in all things, to listen to Him? And not be afraid to ask Him, “Jesus, what do you think I should do?”

When we hear Jesus calling us and are obedient to His Word, we can discover a meaning and purpose for our lives that we might never have found on our own.

A writer tells about a newcomer to a church who came for a parish dinner. He was seated next to an older man. They started talking, and the newcomer learned that the man had been a member there for 25 years. It was a university church where a lot of academic people belonged.

The older man said, “I'm the only non-intellectual left in this church. I haven't understood a sermon here in 25 years.”

The newcomer asked, “Then why have you stayed?”

“Oh, I would never leave this church,” he said.

“What keeps you here?” the newcomer asked.

The man then explained that every Monday night he and others from the church went to the correctional center to visit the young prisoners. “We started this a long time ago.”

The newcomer asked, “Why do you do it?”

The man answered, “Because Christians are supposed to do that kind of thing. I guess that's why I'm here.”

The older fellow may not have understood a sermon in the last 25 years, but he did understand the voice of Jesus calling him to serve a group of young incarcerated men. And he felt that he received more blessings from this ministry than any of the young prisoners did. “Oh,” he had said, “I would never leave this church.”

When we hear Jesus calling us and are obedient to His Word, we can discover a meaning and purpose for our lives that we might never have found on our own.

But what if I think I hear Jesus’ voice, but end up some place where I am not well-suited? Jesus will let you know soon enough.

There is a classic story about a king of Bavaria in the eleventh century named Henry III. King Henry became tired of his responsibilities as king. So he asked the leader of a local monastery to allow him to spend the rest of his life there in prayer and meditation.

The monk responded, “Your Majesty, do you understand that the life here is one of obedience? That will be hard for you since you have been a king for so long.”

“I understand,” Henry said. “For the rest of my life I will be obedient to you, as Jesus Christ directs you.”

The monk responded, “Then I will tell you what to do. Go back to your throne right now and serve faithfully in the place where God Himself has put you.”

After King Henry died, this statement was written in his honor: “The king learned to rule by being obedient.”

The three apostles heard a voice: “This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.” And they listened.

When they gave Him their undivided attention, their lives were filled with His grace. And when they gave Him their full obedience, their witness touched the world, and is still touching it today.

And so, fellow disciples of Jesus, let us not be afraid to ask ourselves honestly: Am I really listening to Jesus’ voice? And am I fully obedient to His Word?

“This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.”