

Good morning. Once again, it's a pleasure to be with all of you this evening, and share a little about our scriptures.

You know, I've been in ministry now for almost 41 years, and that's long enough to make a LOT of mistakes. Today's first reading provided the occasion for one of them, though I'm not sure you remember it. It was on the second Sunday of Lent, I think 15 years ago. And the translation for that Genesis reading, our first reading today, instead of the words "smoking fire pot," used to use the words "smoking brazier." That's b-r-a-z-i-e-r. A brazier is like a weber, with coals in it that you can use to cook meat. Hence, smoking brazier. Well, unfortunately, I pronounced the word wrong the first time I gave the homily, and everybody in the church was wondering what Abram was doing with a smoking *brassiere*!

We just sang together, "The Lord is my light and my salvation." Today in our scriptures we hear about how God calls certain people to a role in the greatest drama of all, a drama we might call **Salvation History**. But don't be confused by the word "history," because that drama includes today, and includes you and me. The Book of Genesis that we read from today describes how God chose Abram - better known now as Abraham, brought him out of a place called Ur (in modern Iraq) and guided him to a new land. There God told Abraham that his descendants would be numerous - like the stars in the night sky. After Abraham offered a sacrifice, a deep, terrifying darkness overwhelmed him. In that dark night God spoke to his heart, telling him what lay in his future, that Abraham and his descendants would play a central role in this "Salvation History."

Today's Gospel speaks about one descendant in particular, the one identified by that voice from the cloud, saying "This is my chosen Son; listen to him." Peter, John and James heard those words and it terrified them. It is not hard to understand why they were frightened. Moses and Elijah had already appeared and had spoken about the role Jesus would carry out. Let me quote the exact words: they "spoke of his exodus which he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem." That's a strange word usage, so let's look at it.

Now, you remember that the Exodus was the great event, possibly the greatest event of the Old Testament - when God led the children of Abraham out of the slavery of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Jesus would accomplish a new Exodus: leading us out from the slavery of sin into the new life of Resurrection. But this exodus would involve something terrifying: the cross. We are so accustomed to seeing the cross that we can forget its horrible reality. It was one of the cruelest forms of torture ever devised. But it is by this cross that Jesus would unite in his person all the suffering of humanity.

Jesus underwent this Exodus so he could awaken us to a different life. And, this is where our part in **Salvation History** comes in. You and I might not have a role like Jesus or Abraham, but we DO have a part in this great drama of salvation. For God HAS spoken similar words over us: "You are my beloved son. You are my much loved daughter." When did that happen? It took place at the moment of our baptism. As St. Paul says, when those waters flow over us, we die with Christ and will rise with him to a new life.

New Life! Before the stars began to form, God thought about you and me. God made us who we are, and made a role for us in this great salvation drama. Yet unlike the stars, we are free beings: we can accept our part or turn it down. If you read closely the Book of Exodus, you will

notice that the children of Abraham did not readily embrace the uncertainties of their new existence, as they traveled in the desert. They remembered their days in Egypt, especially the tasty foods they enjoyed, and they fantasized about their old life. Just so, you and I can prefer our slaveries instead of the high adventure Jesus offers us. We can turn back.

That actually happened with some of the early Christians. St. Paul states in our second reading today that some became enemies of the cross of Christ. “This [the cross] can’t be the sign of who we are!” Even the apostles first felt that way. Did you hear the first couple of words I began our gospel with today? “Eight days after he said this, Jesus took Peter, John and James and went up the mountain to pray.” Our missalette cuts off those first few words, but I put them back in so you might hear that there is a context to our gospel. Eight days before this gospel takes place, for the first time, Jesus had told his disciples that his destiny was to *suffer greatly and be put to death*. “If anyone wishes to come after me . . . you must deny yourself, and take up your cross daily and follow me. If you wish to save your life you will lose it, but if you offer up your life – if you give up your life for my sake – then you will save it.” But of course, when Jesus said this to his apostles, they just didn’t understand how those words made any sense at all . . . so Jesus went for today’s hike up the mountain, and he gave them a vision of glory.

We might not understand what Jesus means by the cross either, might not want to embrace it. We can turn back. I doubt that any of us will get a better offer (!! ) . . . but it is *not* an easy role, to be a disciple of Jesus, and if it feels fine and comfortable for you to be a Christian, maybe you’re asleep and don’t know it. As Paul says today, “our citizenship is in heaven” -- it is our calling, and our fullest destiny; but to reach that goal involves some risk, some sacrifice, maybe some suffering.

But then, we ALL face suffering and death, anyway. Perhaps not at this very moment, but we all will. Like Jesus, we might risk suffering and death as a result of a conscious choice we make, or a calling that we will not deny. I’m reminded of our saints and martyrs. And I’m reminded of all the police officers who have been wounded or killed in Washington in recent time, as our public servants. A great love can bring us into situations of great suffering. I’m reminded of our saints and martyrs. I’m reminded of the police officers who have been wounded or killed in our state in recent times. Lives like these remind us that we really are *glorified luminous beings*, who have the capacity to risk suffering and death, for love.

And of course, each of us will also face sufferings that we do NOT choose. It may be the death of someone we love -- or an accident – or some life-threatening illness – or the relentless growing infirmities of advancing age. We don’t choose these. There is no family down at Children’s Hospital that chooses the illness that brings them there. But what they CAN choose . . . what WE can choose, is how we will live with our sufferings. Even in our sufferings, we are still luminous beings, maybe especially in our sufferings.

The reason Jesus chose to go to Jerusalem and take up his cross, was in order that we would know beyond any shadow of a doubt that in the end, suffering and even death itself cannot conquer us. Our destiny as children of the light goes beyond the grave – we are a part of God’s glory, now and always. And that vision can give us the grace to live a full life in service to others, in spite of the risks or costs to ourselves -- and it can give us the strength to bear our hurts and our infirmities with trust in God, and with love to those around us.