

Homily for the Second Sunday of Lent – Year C
March 17, 2019

There's a scene in the Disney movie *The Lion King* where the wise baboon Rafiki tells Timon, the worrisome meerkat, "Look beyond what you see." I'd like to follow that bit of advice in looking at today's readings.

At first glance there doesn't seem to be anything that remarkable going on in the first reading. God promises Abram many descendants and land to possess, and there's a sort of *strange* part where some animals are cut in half and smoke and fire pass between the halves. And that's about it. Unless we *look beyond what we see*.

When God brought Abram out of Ur, which is in modern Iraq, he was 70 years old. He and his wife were their beyond childbearing years. Yet when God told Abram that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky, Abram immediately *trusted* God's unlikely promise.

He seemed a little less sure about the promise of land though, and asked, "how am I to know that I shall possess it?" And that's where things seemed to get a little *weird*. God asked for a bunch of animals, Abram cut them in two, and later a smoking pot and flaming torch appeared and passed between the halves. It sounds strange to us *today*, but in ancient times the splitting of animals was a common way of establishing a treaty. Or, in *this* case, establishing a *covenant*. God is the smoking pot and the flaming torch. In passing through the halves, He is in effect putting His *signature* to the covenant with Abram, *assuring* him of the promise of descendants and of land.

If you've ever attended the Easter Vigil, you see something similar in the procession of the Easter Candle. In the procession, the *candle*, a "flaming torch," and in many parishes *incense*, a "smoking pot," are brought up the center aisle – *passing between* the two halves of the parish. Just as the events of the first reading signify the covenant established between God and Abram, the procession at the Easter Vigil recalls the *New Covenant* established through Jesus.

That's *beyond what we see* in the first reading. Now let's take a look at the Gospel. What do we *see* there? Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a mountain, was transfigured before them, Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Jesus, Peter blurted out the first thing that came to his mind, a cloud came over them, they heard a voice, the cloud went away, and Jesus was standing there alone. That sums up what we *see*. But there's an awful lot *beyond what we see*.

First, there's the mountain. In the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah both encountered God on mountains – Sinai and Horeb. It's no coincidence that now they encounter *Jesus* on the mountain. Jesus often went to a mountain to pray. And on this same mountain, Peter, James and John witness the glory of Christ revealed in His transfiguration. In Scripture big things often happen on a mountain and this is no exception.

Second, Moses and Elijah appear talking with Jesus. Why Moses and Elijah? Let's *look beyond what we see*. *Moses* represents the Old Covenant *Law*, and *Elijah* represents the *Prophets*. After the cloud goes away, Jesus is standing there alone. Moses and Elijah are no longer there, because Jesus is the *fulfilment* of the Old Covenant Law and Prophets. Through Him, the *New Covenant* will be established. We must also *look beyond what we see* in their conversation. They were talking about the *exodus* that Jesus was going to make. The word *exodus* is not used here by accident. In the Old Testament, Moses led the people on an exodus out slavery in Egypt to the promised land. Jesus' exodus will lead to Jerusalem, where he will be crucified, will rise again, and ascend into heaven; it leads *us* out of the slavery of *sin* and opens the promised land of heaven to us.

There's even more *beyond what we see* in this part of the Gospel. Hidden from view is the number 40. In the Old Testament, Moses spent 40 days with the Lord on Sinai. Elijah journeyed for 40 days to encounter the Lord on Horeb. Because of their sinful disobedience to God, the Israelites spent 40 years wandering in the desert. And here we are, in the season of Lent, which lasts for...40 days. Scripture is *full* of references to the number 40, a number that represents a time of *testing*. Lent is *our* time of testing, of wandering in the desert; a time during which we

recall our *own* disobedience to the Lord. Through prayer, fasting, penance, and almsgiving we strive to grow in holiness and obedience to Him as we journey toward Easter.

Next, there is the cloud and the voice. In scripture, things like clouds, wind, a dove, or fire are often used to depict the presence of the *Holy Spirit*. The *voice* is of course God the Father, who calls Jesus His Son. In the voice, Jesus, and the cloud we see the Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Finally, there is Peter blurting out, “Let us make three tents; one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” What’s *beyond what we see* there? Well, just six days earlier, Jesus asked, “But who do *you* say that I am?” and Peter correctly identified Him as the Messiah. But now here he is, effectively putting Jesus on equal par with Moses and Elijah by suggesting a tent be made for each of them. He, James, and John were in the presence of the Son of God and they didn’t *see* him. Even when they heard the very voice of God saying, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him” they *still* didn’t get it, and fell silent. They were with Jesus every day, but they didn’t *see* Him. They didn’t *look beyond what they saw*.

Before we judge them too critically, we need to ask *ourselves*: Do we *see beyond* prayer, fasting, penance, and almsgiving, or are we just going through the motions during Lent? Do we *look beyond* the sacrifice of abstaining from meat on Fridays or do we just think about the fish fries? In the same way that the first reading pointed to Jesus without being *obvious*, do we *look beyond the obvious* and *see* Jesus in *others*, especially in the poor, the downcast, the afflicted, or the stranger? Do *others* see Him... in *us*?