

Homily of Second Sunday of Lent Year C

In some ancient cultures, including the Aramean culture where Abram belonged, when two parties or individuals made a covenant, they cut an animal into half, arrange the halves on two sides, and the parties or the individuals who made the covenant pass through between the animal parts. This ritual sealed the covenant. Passing through between the animal parts arranged on two sides was a way of swearing, "May what happened to the animal happen to me if I go against the covenant." This ritual seems, partly, to be what is described in the first reading. "Abram brought him [God] all these, split them in two, placed each half opposite the other...When the sun had set and it was dark, there appeared a smoking fire pot and flaming torch, which passed between those pieces. It was on that occasion that the Lord made a covenant with Abram..." The smoking fire pot and flaming torch which passed between the animal parts can be said to represent God passing through between the animal parts. We can also assume that Abram might have passed through between the animal parts before the trance fell upon him.

The first reading is not a study of ancient Aramean's way of making a covenant. It is a reminder of our various covenants with God, especially our baptismal covenant. We make the following baptismal promises: to renounce sin, evil and Satan; and to believe in God, in Jesus, and in the Holy Spirit. Because we have all fallen short of our baptismal promises, we are, therefore, called to repentance, especially, during the holy season of Lent. We are invited to draw close to Jesus. As the second reading says, "He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body..." The same invitation is given to us in the Gospel. We are invited to transfigure as Jesus was transfigured, and to dazzle as Jesus dazzled.

To change, transfigure and dazzle means to reject Satan, to reject sin, and to reject lures and occasions of sin. It means to renew one's spiritual life.

To transfigure means to change in order to reveal hidden beauty of the soul and body. The beauty of one's soul and body can be hidden by concerns and anxieties of life. There are people who used to be warm and happy, who dazzled in their assignments and responsibilities. But now, they perform very poorly. Such people are invited to put their faith in God as Abram did. God will transfigure them and they will dazzle again.

There are times the beauty of our soul and body are hidden not by any fault of ours but by difficulties of life. At such times, it is faith in God that transfigures us in the face of the difficulties.

In our time, it is no longer to sacrifice "a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, and a three-year-old ram, a turtle dove, and a young pigeon," it is to draw close to Jesus who died for us. He sealed the covenant between human being and God by his blood shed on the Cross. That is why God says, as we read in the Gospel, "This is my chosen Son; listen to him." Our transformation and transfiguration are assured if we listen to Jesus and follow him.

Jesus confirms the transformative power of his words:

Matthew 7:24-25, "Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock."

John 6:63, "It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life."

John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life."

John 15:7, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you."

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP