

Sacrifice Behind Success

I. A LOOK AT THE THREE READINGS

FIRST READING (Gen 15:2-12,17-18)

The Childless Abram

²But Abram said, “Lord God, what can you give me, if I die childless and have only a servant of my household, Eliezer of Damascus?” ³Abram continued, “Look, you have given me no offspring, so a servant of my household will be my heir.”

God’s Promise

⁴Then the word of the LORD came to him: No, that one will not be your heir; your own offspring will be your heir.^a ⁵He took him outside and said: Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so, he added, will your descendants be.^b ⁶**Abram put his faith in the LORD**, who attributed it to him as an act of righteousness.^c

God repeats promise

⁷He then said to him: I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as a possession.^d

Abram’s question (skepticism)

⁸“Lord God,” he asked, “how will I know that I will possess it?”

God’s assurances

⁹ He answered him: Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon.^e ¹⁰He brought him all these, split them in two, and placed each half opposite the other; but the birds he did not cut up. ¹¹Birds of prey swooped down on the carcasses, but Abram scared them away. ¹²As the sun was about to set, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a great, dark dread descended upon him.

¹³ Then the LORD said to Abram: Know for certain that your descendants will reside as aliens in a land not their own, where they shall be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years.^f ¹⁴But I will bring judgment on the nation they must serve, and after this they will go out with great wealth.^g ¹⁵You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace; you will be buried at a ripe old age. ¹⁶In the fourth generation* your descendants will return here, for the wickedness of the Amorites is not yet complete.^h

¹⁷When the sun had set and it was dark, there appeared a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch, which passed between those pieces.

God’s covenant and promise (repeated)

¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: To your descendants I give this land, from



the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River, the Euphrates,
THE FOCUS: The faith of Abraham

COMMENTARY

- From the text, we can develop three important themes: Faith, Descendants, Land.
- Abram is counting on God’s promise to have children. Abram seems to be impatient. He feels his life is meaningless without children. God restates his promise in Gen 12: to give him not just a son but many children
- God’s promise includes the land. The land will also be occupied by his descendants.
- Abram’s faith is acknowledged in the text (v.6).

REFLECTIONS

God is a God who promises. He promises to Abram children and land. And Abram responds in faith. Does God fulfill his promises right away?

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 27:1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14)
THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION.

SECOND READING (Phi 3:17-4:1)

An invitation of Paul

¹⁷ *m* Join with others in being imitators of me,* brothers, and observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us.

What happens to those who don’t imitate Paul?

¹⁸ For many, as I have often told you and now tell you even in tears, conduct themselves as enemies of the

cross of Christ. ^{19o}Their end is destruction. Their God is their stomach; their glory is in their “shame.” Their minds are occupied with earthly things.

What happens if we imitate him?

^{20p}But our citizenship* is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ^{21q}He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself. ^{4 1*}Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, beloved.

THE FOCUS: Being imitators of Paul

COMMENTARY

- In v.17 Paul invites the Philippians to imitate him also and to behave the same way.
- In vv.18-19, Paul enumerates the behavior of those who don’t imitate him: They conduct themselves as enemies of the cross... Their end is destruction. God is their stomach. Materialistic. Glory in their shame.
- In vv.20-4:1, Paul portray a hopeful future for those who live the faith like him: Our citizenship is in heaven. We await a savior, Jesus Christ. To glorify our bodies.
- In 4 v.1, Paul reiterates his point: Christians should stand firm in the faith. Jesus the Lord is the center of their lives (not food and earthly things, and false glory).

REFLECTIONS

It pays to imitate Paul. Others have done it so must we. Those who don’t care remain in their paganistic tendencies.

GOSPEL READING (Lk 9:28b-36)

Setting / Context of Prayer

^{28* q} About eight days after he said this, he took Peter, John, and James and went up the mountain to pray.

The transfiguration

²⁹ While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white.

Appearance of Moses and Elijah

^{* 30} And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, ^{* 31*} who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.

Peter awakened and his initiative

^{32*} Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep, but becoming fully awake, they saw his glory* and the two men standing with him. ³³ As they were about to part from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good

that we are here; let us make three tents,* one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” But he did not know what he was saying.

The voice of God

^{34*} While he was still speaking, a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud. ^{35*} Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my chosen Son; **listen to him.**” ³⁶ After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. They fell silent and did not at that time* tell anyone what they had seen.

THE FOCUS: Listening to Jesus

COMMENTARY

- The transfiguration happens in the context of prayer in the mountain (Mt. Tabor). The transfiguration itself is not described at length, in one verse only v. 29.
- Moses and Elijah (two great representatives of the Old Testament) adds to the grandeur of the transfiguration. The transfiguration has a bearing on the theme of Lent: the exodus of Jesus. (There was exodus in the time of Moses; Elijah too experienced exodus when he ran away from Jezebel, but to Mt. Sinai/Horeb). The exodus of Jesus will happen on Mt. Zion (Jerusalem). How?
- Peter’s proposal is not taken. Instead God (sounds and images alluding to the Sinai Event) offers a counter proposal. “Listen to him!” Meaning, they will accompany him in the way of the cross, in his exodus. The glimpse, in a second, must be enough for them to cope when the unexpected things will happen to Jesus.

REFLECTIONS

Emphasis is the context of the conversation between Jesus, Moses and Elijah, which is Jesus’ own exodus. Jesus is psychologically, spiritually and bodily ready to undergo the paschal mystery.

II. TYING THE THREE READINGS TOGETHER TO DEVELOP YOUR HOMILY/SHARING

Share your own journey to success (how you attained your ambition, in board exams, priesthood). How did you attain success? In this season, the readings remind us that to attain salvation, to succeed in our faith, to be successful Christians and followers of Christ, we must be patient like Abraham, we must be focused like Paul, and must be willing to sacrifice like Jesus.

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