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

God put Abraham to the test. He called to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am!” he replied. Then God said: “Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you.”

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. Then he reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the LORD’s messenger called to him from heaven, “Abraham, Abraham!” “Here I am!” he answered. “Do not lay your hand on the boy,” said the messenger. “Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son.” As Abraham looked about, he spied a ram caught by its horns in the thicket. So he went and took the ram and offered it up as a holocaust in place of his son.

Again the LORD’s messenger called to Abraham from heaven and said: “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you acted as you did in not withholding from me your beloved son, I will bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore; your descendants shall take possession of the gates of their enemies, and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing— all this because you obeyed my command.”

Reading 2  Romans 8:31B-34

Brothers and sisters: If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him? Who will bring a charge against God’s chosen ones? It is God who acquits us, who will condemn? Christ Jesus it is who died – or, rather, was raised – who also is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

Gospel  Mark 9:2-10

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them. Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified. Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; from the cloud came a voice, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.” Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them.

As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant.

HOMILY

Who is our God?

Maybe a better question is, “Who do we believe God is in each of our lives?” Or, “Where have you experienced God in your life, recently?” We each have our own idea of who our God is, formed by the Bible, our faith, Church teachings, family and historical tradition, our own personal experiences, and maybe even a bit of our imagination mixed in there – you get the picture.

Speaking of pictures, a kindergarten teacher asked her classroom of children to each draw something which they liked. She walked around to see the artwork from each child, and she came to one
little girl who was working really hard, focusing very intently on her drawing, so the teacher asked what the drawing was. The girl quickly replied, “I'm drawing God.” The teacher paused for a moment, not quite sure how to respond, but then said, “But no one really knows what God looks like.” Without missing a beat, or looking up from her drawing, the girl replied, “Well, they will in a minute!”

Besides some imagination, like our young friend had, our idea of who God is may have been formed by our own personal experiences. Who believes that they may have experienced God in their life? Don’t worry, I won’t go around and ask what your personal experience has been. In my diaconate formation, we had a class that asked at the start of every session, “Where have you experienced God recently in your life?” Not just one time, but recently … we were encouraged to look where God had been manifested in our life, recently … and often. Some meetings that I now attend pose the question a little differently, something like, “Who would like to share a God-moment, where you recently felt the presence of God in your life?” Sometimes, that God-moment might be among other people, where you might witness the exciting birth of a baby. Some have said it was the joyful smile of an elderly family member or friend as he or she passed from this life to the next. Sometimes, the God-moment can be very personal, having a special meaning to you that may not even be appreciated by others around you. About a year and a half ago, my wife and I were in the Penn Yan area. It was late, maybe 1 am or so, and I stepped outside to a very clear sky – no moon or clouds to hide the multitude of stars. I had this sudden feeling of thankfulness and appreciation to God for some events that had recently happened, like getting through a difficult time or two, and for me being able to just come outside and witness this beautiful night sky. I remember saying out loud, “Thank you, Lord.” No sooner had I finished those words, when I saw this bright, shooting star, this meteor, which stayed visible for several seconds as it traveled a good portion of the night sky. To me, the timing was no coincidence.

As much of a “wow-factor” that shooting star was to me, can you imagine the God-moment that Peter, James and John must have had on that high mountain with Jesus. Peter “hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified,” when he saw Jesus with Moses and Elijah. It was an experience beyond anything the 3 disciples had experienced to date. After all, they and the other 9 apostles had accompanied Jesus for 3 years, watching Him feed thousands of people with a few items of food, healing lepers and other sick people, casting out demons and, then, walking on water. And Jesus had even given them the authority to heal the sick and cast out demons as He sent them out 2x2 into the villages and towns, without Him. But this was different, very different … and the past week for them had been very different. Six days earlier, Jesus had asked them who they thought He was, and among the various responses, Peter replied, “You are the Messiah.” Jesus then told them about His upcoming Passion, Death and Resurrection, and they struggled with that – they couldn’t believe what they were hearing – this Messiah, who they believed would be the hero of Israel, who would make Israel great again, was telling them that He was going to suffer, and be killed … and then rise again after 3 days. The thought was upsetting their whole world, their whole plan for their future – as political leaders of a new Israel. They struggled with this for 6 days, as they traveled with Jesus. And now, on the mountain, here was Jesus, in clothing that became so bright, so dazzling white, and He was talking with Moses and Elijah – the two prominent figures of the Hebrew Scriptures, representing both the Law and the Prophets. To them, Jesus had now been elevated to an even higher level of prominence – a level at least equal to that of Moses and Elijah. Then came the cloud, and the shadow, and the voice, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.” God was telling them – listen, pay attention, do what He says – He’s in charge, He knows what He’s doing. Coming down from the mountain, the Gospel tells us that they were “questioning what rising from the dead meant.” So, they still had unanswered questions, but this experience of God, this God-moment, prompted them to continue following Jesus.
Who is our God, and where have you recently experienced God in your life? Lent is a great time to make your faith more meaningful, to get to know God better. (1) Our God is a loving and personal God – last weekend, you heard about Eucharistic Adoration and a personal story from a regular adorer on what being truly present with Jesus meant to him or her, in the quiet atmosphere of a chapel. You heard about people bringing their problems, their questions, their happenings in life, to the Lord, in search of an answer or in thanksgiving for one received. And you heard a personal invitation for you to come and experience it for yourself, even if just one time. Your life can be changed, maybe even like Jesus’ apostles. There are yellow cards in the pews that you can bring home and return to the small boxes at the church exits. Or, see me after mass or email me. (2) Our God is a welcoming God – a great way to get to know God is in the Eucharist! Bishop Matano proclaimed this to be the Year of the Eucharist, until the feast of Corpus Christi in early June. To provide you with all sorts of suggestions to participate in knowing, sharing, promoting, receiving and learning about the Eucharist, a board has been set up in the back of Church – check it out, take a tag as a reminder and for us to track, and then follow-up with the idea. The Works of Mercy board setup until a year ago was a huge success, including one youngster’s Facebook page. Can we make this one even greater? (3) Our God is a merciful God – in our 2nd reading today, St. Paul is telling the Romans that God is on our side, and not out to charge us for our sins but to acquit us, with Jesus interceding for us. If you need to receive the Sacrament of Penance because of a serious matter, or you haven’t gone in a while, please take advantage of the Day of Reconciliation on March 14, or other days and times listed in the bulletin. (4) Our God is in our midst – many people say that they have experienced God through the lives and actions of others, in our everyday experiences, or in helping others. And, of course, God is present in His Word. Lent provides a perfect opportunity to pray for the grace to recognize God in our midst.

Have you experienced God in your life recently? Our God is here with us, try to know our God better. Our Lord is truly present in the Eucharist – I invite you to have your next God-experience … now.