February 21, 2016
Second Sunday in Lent – “It Is Good That We Are Here”
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Reading 1 Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18
The Lord God took Abram outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so,” he added, “shall your descendants be.” Abram put his faith in the LORD, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness.

He then said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as a possession.” “O Lord GOD,” he asked, “how am I to possess it?” He answered him, “Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” Abram brought him all these, split them in two, and placed each half opposite the other; but the birds he did not cut up. Birds of prey swooped down on the carcasses, but Abram stayed with them. As the sun was about to set, a trance fell upon Abram, and a deep, terrifying darkness enveloped him. When the sun had set and it was dark, there appeared a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch, which passed between those pieces. It was on that occasion that 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.”

Reading 2 Phil 3:17 – 4:1
Join with others in being imitators of me, brothers and sisters, and observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us. For many, as I have often told you and now tell you even in tears, conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction. Their God is their stomach; their glory is in their “shame.” Their minds are occupied with earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. 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.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord.

Jesus took Peter, John, and James and went up the mountain to pray. While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep, but becoming fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. 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. While he was still speaking, a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my chosen Son; listen to him.” After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. They fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen.

HOMILY
The night before last, we chatted with our son in Albany – he was at home, and he asked for our prayers because, “Something was beginning to happen.” You see, he and his wife were expecting their fourth child, and she was almost two weeks overdue. We asked if it was hospital time yet, and he said they would know when it would be time. Six hours later, they were at the hospital and little Matthew Aloysius had just arrived. In subsequent conversations, we commented that the timing was great with
them making it to the hospital, **it was good that they were there, instead of at home, or elsewhere.**  All are doing well now.

“Master, it is **good** that we are here.”  My story may not be the best example of being somewhere where you need to be, and being thankful for it, but it was certainly on my mind as I thought about Luke’s account of the Transfiguration in today’s Gospel story. Before we dive into this further, let’s look first at the roller-coaster emotional ride that James and John and, especially, Peter had been on … in the events leading up to this experience on the mountain, which set the stage for Peter’s comment to Jesus, “Master, it is **good** that we are here.”  Luke’s timeline had Jesus performing miracles in the countryside, and sending out his apostles, “proclaiming the good news and curing diseases everywhere.”  Jesus fed the five-thousand, and then, later on, asked the apostles who they thought He was.  I’m not sure where Peter would have fallen on the Briggs-Meyer scale, but he certainly spoke his mind, replying that Jesus was the Messiah of God.  Jesus didn’t deny it, but told them not to tell anyone else.  Peter had gotten it right – we might imagine his excitement!  But then, Jesus told them the conditions of being His disciple.  He predicted His passion, death, and resurrection, and told them that they, also, must deny themselves, take up their cross daily and follow Him.  Whoa!  – Peter may have thought, “What happened to the Messiah role, the Savior of Israel?”  So, Luke tells us that eight days later Jesus takes these three disciples with Him to pray.  They must have been confused, trying to figure out what was really going on, and evidently very tired – they were overcome by sleep, and woke up to see Jesus conversing with Moses and Elijah.  Moses and Elijah!!  Two pillars of Jewish religious history, the two who represented the Law and the Prophets, the two who were believed to have been brought up directly into heaven!  Now, this was no ordinary conversation going on – this was something special, this was extraordinary – the disciples may have wanted it to continue, maybe never to end, so Peter offered to build three tents for them.  “Master, it is **good** that we are here.”

How many times in our own life have we thought to ourselves, “Wow!  It was a good thing that I was there for this or that event.”  It might have been a special time, an important time in your life … it might have been a moment that you didn’t want to end … it might have just been something that seemed relatively unimportant at the time, but turned out to be very special.  Maybe it was something you had planned for, but maybe it was just something that caught you by surprise.  Those are the ones that might cause you later on to raise your eyes up and say, “Wow, Lord!  This is YOUR work.”  Peter, James and John had a theophany – simply put, a manifestation or appearance of God to the human senses.  You may consider these occasions in your own life that are important, and especially the surprises, as spiritual manifestations of God.  I’ve mentioned to you in the past that Barb and I try to say a prayer each morning that we might help someone who needs it that day, and then, often enough, something happens.  Now, many times, it’s just a matter of being somewhere, as a part of our routine daily life, when someone needs help.  Very often, it’s not a major event.  Recently, Barb was chatting with someone – a total stranger – standing near her in line somewhere, and offered a contact name to something they were discussing that was important to the person.  < > But sometimes, the event is a lot more substantial.  Also recently, I heard a small noise where I happened to be, a different kind of noise than normal, like someone rustling through boxes and knocking a few over.  I can’t give many details here, for confidentiality and other reasons, but I asked around to a few others in the area.  One person responded in a different way than
expected, and thinking back to something this person had told me just a few days earlier, I decided to be a little more watchful. Let’s just say that an ambulance needed to be called shortly afterwards and the person did need their assistance … thankfully, everything turned out well. Coincidence? I don’t believe it! It was definitely a time when I raised my eyes up to say, ‘Wow, Lord! Thank you for allowing someone to be here to help.’ I’m sure that you can find occasions in your own life when you might look back now and say, “Lord, it is good that I was there.”

During Lent, we often talk about three ways to bring ourselves closer to knowing and loving God and our neighbor: prayer, almsgiving and fasting. Let’s look at prayer for a moment. Certainly, our Eucharistic sacrifice, our Sunday Mass, is a prayer, which joins us all together as the Body of Christ. Every aspect of the Mass, the liturgy, the readings, the homily, the consecration, the sharing of the Eucharist, is an important part. And, each and every one of us, just by our presence here every week, is an important member of this Body of Christ, offering praise and thanksgiving in our communal prayer. How important should this prayer be to us? I heard a well-respected speaker on Catholic Radio, a lay apologist, ask if you would spend an hour each week with someone you love, so then why wouldn’t you spend an hour with your loving God. What about other prayer opportunities? Don’t forget that morning prayer, asking God if you can help others. But, also, St. Louis offers a weekly Holy Hour in a group setting, and private prayer times with Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration – please consider trying it at least once – further information on yellow cards in the pews or at each side entrance and in the Narthex. Join in with other parishioners who can readily say, “Master, it is good that we are here.”

Almsgiving? There are many opportunities offered at St. Louis. For example, a month ago, the Corporal Works of Mercy Tagboard was added to the back wall, with many opportunities you could help out with, both in the parish and outside in the wider community. Many involve a more direct contact with those who need additional help. I encourage you to join with many other parishioners who have taken almost 200 tags to date, and who can truly say, “Master, it is good that we are here to help others.”

Fasting – fasting can bring us closer to God, and our neighbor, in several ways. It causes us a little discomfort, to help keep us spiritually awake. It can allow us to save time, talent or treasure and use them for those that truly need our help, versus using them less fruitfully.

St. Paul tells us in today’s Second Reading, that our citizenship is in heaven. As disciples of Christ, as members of His Body, it is our sure hope that one day we may be in heaven with Him in His eternal glory, and say to Him, “Master, it is good that we are here.”