

Homily 24 February 2013  
Second Sunday of Lent

*Genesis 15:5-12,17-18; Psalm 27:1,7-8 8-9,13-14; Philippians 3:17—4:1; Luke 9:28b-36*



Last Sunday I went to the Cathedral with the people in the RCIA program for the Rite of Election. We arrived early, so several of us decided to walk through the little art gallery in the ambulatory behind the altar.

The gallery holds paintings, statues, and altar pieces from the Spanish colonial period in Latin America. There are several pieces that depict Christ with blood streaming from his wounds onto the people gathered around him. In one painting the flow of blood divides and pours out on a flock of lambs.

It's a motif that's a little startling when you first encounter it, somewhat gruesome in fact, and I could tell that the others weren't quite sure what to make of it.

It is reminder to me of one of the paradoxes of our faith: through suffering and death comes life. Jesus suffered a cruel death, yet through his death he reconciled us to God and opened the way to eternal life.

But his death was unjust and we don't like to think about it. In that way, we have a lot in common with Peter.



Perhaps a day or two before his Transfiguration, Jesus had asked his disciples what people thought of him. "Who do they say that I am?" he asked. They told him what they had heard. Then Jesus asked them, "but who do you say that I am?" Peter replied, "the messiah of God."

And then Jesus predicted his impending passion. He told them that he would soon have to suffer and be killed.

Shocked by this prediction, Peter rebuked him: "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." It was a human reaction by a good man for his beloved teacher.

Yet Jesus in turn had to rebuke Peter. The cross could not be pushed aside. It would have to be endured – resolutely – because it was necessary.

Later that week, Jesus took Peter and the others up the mountain where he was transfigured before them. Having seen his humanity, they could now see clearly his divinity.

Seemingly befuddled by this great revelation, Peter says something that sounds so odd: “Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

But it wasn’t the statement of a stammering, befuddled man. Peter knew the implication of what he had just seen. We just don’t understand the context of the story.

In Israel it was the time of the festival of booths ... or tents; a festival that began as a celebration in the vineyards at the conclusion of the grape and olive harvest. It was accompanied by dancing, merrymaking, and feasting. The name comes from the temporary booths or tents set up to accommodate the harvesters at this busy time.

Over the generations, the Festival of Booths grew in religious significance. The tents served to commemorate the forty years the Israelites had spent wandering in the desert.

By Jesus’ day, the feast had also taken on messianic overtones. It anticipated the coming of the kingly messiah and the great feast that would herald the beginning of that golden age.

Yet in for each generation, the tents were still at the heart of the celebration.

Well, Peter, of course, knew all of this.

And now the messiah was here. The true feast could begin.

Maybe, he thought, we could just forget that awful prediction of the passion, put up the tents and *move on* to the glories of the messianic age.

But it was not to be.

Jesus led them back down the mountain and on toward Jerusalem, to the exodus that he had just discussed with Moses and Elijah.

Moses had led the people out of slavery to the Promised Land.

Now Jesus would lead the people out of death into Eternal Life with God.



As the first exodus was about to begin, the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: Tell people to take some of the lamb's blood and

apply it to the doorposts and the lintel of their houses. For on this night I will go through Egypt, striking down every firstborn in the land. But for you the blood will mark the houses where you are. Seeing the blood, I will pass over you.

As he spoke on that mountain of the coming exodus he would accomplish, the Lord Jesus gave no instructions concerning blood. He would provide what was needed.

Many people, wrote Paul, conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ. It is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. Yet we know that we have redemption by his blood. We will receive the riches of his grace because of that second exodus he accomplished for us.



Before every celebration of Easter, comes Good Friday ... and before every Good Friday comes forty day of Lent. It is a season of regret, sorrow and hope. A time to reflect on all the ways, great and small, that we have sinned against God and our neighbor:

- to recall the ways we have hurt those we love,
- or the times we have ignored the stranger,
- or failed to be merciful and forgiving to those who have trespassed against us.

It is for such sins and more that Jesus died.

But Lent is also a time of hope because we are not enslaved to our sins. If we repent, seek reconciliation, and believe the Gospel, then we have not only a past, but also a future.

Perhaps this Lent, you might choose to stand awhile before one of those old depictions of Christ with blood flowing from his wounds and remind yourselves that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

See in those streams of blood not the gruesome obsession of some long dead artist, but a portrayal of the love of God, which has been poured out for us.