

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent “Hobbits and Grace”

Bishop Frank Schuster

There are so many memorable moments from Tolkien’s book “The Hobbit”. One of my favorites is the opening chapter when Bilbo spots a man in front of his house with a staff and pointy hat. Today, I can’t help but to consider this to be an apt description of a bishop! Bilbo says, “Good Morning!” Gandalf replies, “What do you mean? Do you wish me a good morning, or meant that is a good morning whether I want it or not; or that you feel good this morning; or that it is a morning to be good on?” Bilbo’s answer entertains, “All of them at once.” Gandalf then gets straight to the point, “I am looking for someone to share in an adventure that I am arranging, and it is very difficult to find anyone.” Bilbo’s answer is classic, “I should think so – in these parts! We are plain quiet folk and have no use for adventures. Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner!” Most of us know the end of that story. If you don’t, as always, the book is better than the movie.

The reason why I mention this story is because of how our first reading from Genesis begins, “The Lord said to Abram: ‘Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you.’” I think it was Bishop Barron who joked once, “It makes you wonder how many doors the Lord had to knock on before he got someone to say yes.” Like Bilbo, Abram was sent out on an unexpected adventure, except Abram’s adventure was far more perilous with much more on the line. You see, travel in those days was extremely risky and at times travel could end up being life threatening. Abram, however, was a man of faith. In fact, we call Abraham the father of faith because he said yes to God’s invitation to go forth from his land to an undiscovered country.

I am amused that our parish here at St. Vincent de Paul last Sunday, and Ash Wednesday before that, had a man who wears a pointy hat calling each of us to go forth onto an adventure. More entertaining still, that man with the pointy hat is me! The ashes we received called us to leave the comfortable behind so to follow the Lord on an adventure into a desert, to a new land that he will show us. Easter Sunday is our destination, a world where death does not have the final say, a world that is forever in the presence of the Lord, and a world that never ends. We embarked on this pilgrimage because we are a people of faith. We trust the Lord and we will follow him to the cross itself because we know the story does not end there. Our pilgrimage began with a spirit of repentance along with deeper commitment to prayer, fasting and almsgiving because this is a journey that will lead us to the resurrection and eternal life.

The transfiguration on the mountain as described by St. Matthew in today’s Gospel reading foreshadows where our earthly pilgrimage with Jesus is leading us. Jesus shows us where we are going. Everything the ancient Hebrews longed for through the Torah and the Prophets is fulfilled in the person of Jesus. Peter wants to build tents so that they can all stay in that moment, however, Jesus makes it clear that their journey must go on. Like Peter, James, and John, we are offered glimpses of God’s glory in our lives at times, but we cannot stay on those mountain tops for very long either. Like Abram, we are challenged at times to pick up our walking stick and travel to the land that the Lord will show us. We call that faith. For Peter, James and John, the journey after the transfiguration led them to the foot of the cross and the

glory of the resurrection. What they saw with their eyes, we are called to believe in faith. You see, the transfiguration of Jesus this weekend offers us a glimpse of our destination.

However, on a deeper and more spiritual level, we can also ask ourselves along the way, what are the areas in our lives that need the grace of transfiguration right now? What comforts do I need to put behind me so to go on that adventure? We are encouraged by the words of St. Paul to Timothy in this regard, “Beloved: bear your share of hardship for the Gospel with the strength that comes from God. He saved us and called us to a holy life, not according to our works, but according to his own design and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began...” Think about that. St. Paul said that God has been planning this adventure for us since before time began. This means God has been planning our salvation for a very long time.

Therefore, we can think of this Sunday in this way. On mountain trails that are difficult to see, sign markers, or little piles of rocks along the way called cairns help keep people from getting lost. We can think of the Sundays of Lent as cairns on our Lenten pilgrimage. On the Second Sunday of Lent, it is a good moment to ask: How am I faring with my Lenten observance right now? Am I on the path that was laid out for me when I started, has there been a detour, or have I gotten lost? On that topic, I can’t help but think of Bilbo’s advice to his nephew in the Lord of the Rings, “It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don’t keep your feet, there’s no knowing where you might be swept off to.” This is why today could mark a good time to reflect on where the Holy Spirit is leading us and to be open to what the Holy Spirit has to say because God just might offer us a new direction. He might call us to find an undiscovered country in our souls that could lead to a transfiguration of our hearts. My friends, no matter what the future holds, with hearts filled with faith, we continue our Lenten trail to that land God will show us, with manna from heaven to feed us who is Christ and Lord.