

Our Sunday Readings

GENESIS 15:5-12,17-18
 PSALM 27:1,7-9,13-14
 PHILIPPIANS 3:17-4:1
 LUKE 9:28b-36

Visions of God

GENESIS 15:5-12,17-18

Reading closely

1. What does God promise?
2. How does Abram respond?
3. What ritual does Abram do?
4. What might Abram have expected to happen?
5. What do you think Abram's trance was like?
6. What is God's role in the ritual?
7. If you were Abram, what would you be feeling during these events?

Living the word

8. What does *righteousness* mean?
9. What makes a person righteous?
10. Has God promised you anything?

THE FIRST READING

Children and land

The people of Abram's era didn't believe in an afterlife. The only way to "live" after death was by having children, who would remember and honor their ancestors. Children were so important that the inability to have them was often looked upon as a curse.

Every family also needed land to sustain themselves and any flocks or herds they had. The larger the family, the more land they needed. God promises Abram a region of land that is as vast as his descendants will be.

This passage includes two versions of a story that were combined from two separate oral traditions. In vv.5-6 Abram simply believes God. In vv.7-18 he asks God to help him believe.

Cutting a covenant

At this time in the ancient near east, people often made covenants by cutting animals in half. They then placed the carcasses several feet apart in two parallel rows. The people making the treaty next walked between the animal parts. This symbolic action meant, "If I break our treaty, let it be done to me as was done to these animals." In this story, one of the treaty members is God, who is represented by the fire.

It was on that occasion that the LORD made a covenant with Abram...

LUKE 9:28b-36

Entering the word

1. Imagine that you're Peter, John, or James.
 - a. What are you thinking as Jesus leads you up the mountain?
 - b. Why do you fall asleep?
 - c. What wakes you up?
 - d. How do you recognize Moses and Elijah?
 - e. Do you hear Jesus talk with Moses and Elijah? If so, what do they discuss?
 - f. Do you want Moses and Elijah to stay?
 - g. How would you describe the cloud?
 - h. What does the voice sound like?
 - i. What all do you feel?
 - j. Why don't you tell anyone about what happened? Do you ever tell?
 - k. If you talk about what happened with the other two disciples, what do you say?

Living the word

2. In what ways are you asleep? How should God wake you up?
3. How well are you listening to God's Son?

THE GOSPEL READING

While he was praying

Luke emphasizes the importance of prayer. In his Gospel the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus *right after* his baptism, while Jesus is praying.

Jesus is praying on a mountain. In the Old Testament dramatic encounters with God often took place on mountains. Mountains were close to "the heavens," the realm of God.

Moses & Elijah

Two of the most revered figures in the Jewish tradition appear with Jesus. Their stories interconnect with his.

- Moses led people out of slavery and into a new relationship with God
- Moses went up a mountain to receive God's law
- while Moses was on Mount Sinai, a cloud descended upon it
- Elijah glimpsed God while on a mountain
- Elijah didn't die, but was taken up to heaven; people believed he would return to warn people of God's coming

Moses and Elijah represent God's law and prophets. In the presence of Jesus, however, even these important people fade away. Jesus is the final law-giver and the greatest of God's prophets.

Waking up

After Jesus' baptism God called Jesus his *beloved son*. Peter calls Jesus *the Messiah of God* (9:20), a title that implies God has chosen Jesus for a special mission. Now God declares that Jesus is his *chosen son*.

The disciples are slowly waking up to who Jesus is and what he's going to do. Peter wants to enjoy the glory of Jesus' mission. God's voice reminds them to pay attention to what Jesus tells them about suffering and discipleship (9:22-23,44).

Jesus' exodus

Jesus talks with Moses and Elijah about his *exodus* or *departure*. This refers both to his death and to how he will lead others to new life.

Both the context of this passage and its reference to Jesus' exodus make it clear that the glory to come can't be separated from Jesus' passion and death. Peter and the other disciples can't stay on the mountain.

Jesus has begun to warn his disciples that he will suffer and be killed. True disciples follow Jesus down difficult paths. Glory will come, but only if the disciples listen to Jesus and follow where he leads.

PRAYER

from Alternate Collect, Second Sunday of Lent

Father of light,
 in you is found no shadow of change
 but only the fullness of life and limitless truth.
 Open our hearts to the voice of your Word
 and free us from the original darkness that shadows
 our vision.
 Restore our sight that we may look upon your Son
 who calls us to repentance and a change of heart,
 for he lives and reigns with you
 forever and ever. Amen.