

2nd Sunday of Lent Homily 3-16-14

Have you made out your will...as in your last will and testament? I mention this because recently all priests in the Archdiocese received a reminder to make sure they have a will and have made any special arrangements they want for their funeral. It seems that Archdiocese had to put out the memo because priests are not that different from other people. Many priests have not made out wills. We don't think we are going to die.

Yes, most of us don't think we are going to die. The other night my brother said as much to me. He said he noticed that half of the people listed in the obituary section of the newspaper were younger than he is. But, of course, we are not going to die. We started comparing our financial savings and he said he is now at the downside of his income. Based on the average lifespan of Americans, his financial planning is now reached the age where he is beginning to take money out of his savings. The plan is that he will run out of money just after he dies. His financial planning tells him quite directly that he is not to live forever.

(pause)

So often when we reflect on Jesus in the scriptures, we view him as the greatest teacher of faith and morals.

We also know that Jesus came to heal and forgive people.

But do we really embrace the fact that he came primarily to help us face suffering and sin and death?

In fact, he came to model for us how to confront our fear of suffering and death issues and how to overcome them.

Today's gospel story speaks to the very point of overcoming our fears. Jesus brings his inner circle of disciples, Peter, James and John up a mountain to pray. Remember, it is on mountain tops that God has revealed himself in the past. In the Old Testament it was on the mountain top that God spoke to Moses, giving him the commandments and to Elijah, strengthening him in time of trouble. Now the disciples see Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus on the mountain of God. Scripture says Jesus was transfigured before their eyes. He became as brilliant as the sun.

The disciples are overwhelmed by the experience. Peter was energized. He came up to Jesus and said, "Hey Lord, let's pitch camp here. I will build a tent for you and one for Moses and for Elijah." Peter wants to stay on his religious high. He does not want to leave the mountain top

of ecstatic prayer. He did not want to go down the mountain; he did not want to face suffering and rejection and death. None of us do! No, Lord, let's stay on the mountain.

Then the disciples heard the words of the Father which had been guiding Jesus his whole public life, the very words the Father spoke to him at his baptism. "This is my son, my beloved in whom I am well pleased." Then God adds three more words.

- Three words not spoken to Jesus at his baptism.
- Three words addressed directly to the disciples, to all of us who are disciples of the Lord and live in fear.
- The three words are LISTEN TO HIM.

Just as Jesus needed to know that he was the beloved of the Father before he faced the temptations of Satan in the desert, so we all need the experiences of mountain top prayer, the gentle affirming touch of God, before we live out our faith in the valley of everyday life so that we can face suffering and death without fear.

Yes, we need to experience God speaking to us in mountaintop experiences. Isn't that why we gather every Sunday?

We need to encounter Him through reading His word and in communion.

We need to experience God's presence in small faith sharing groups in our households and in our community.

We need to welcome him one on one in the quiet of our hearts.

But know this: the purpose of those prayerful mountain top experiences, if they truly are from the living God, are not just to entertain a spiritual high. Our mountain top experiences of prayer should lead us back down the mountain to the valley of our everyday life to suffer, die and rise with Christ.

And so I ask you to look at your neighbor and say, "Neighbor, neighbor, what are you afraid of?"

As we begin this second week of Lent, you may be still asking yourself, "What should I be doing to make this Lenten season one of spiritual growth?" I can assure you, if you spend time on mountaintops of prayer, the Lord promises he will give you the strength to stand up and conquer your fears. Then the words which Jesus shared with his disciples on the way down from the mountain, he will also speak to our hearts, "Rise, do not be afraid!"

