2nd Sunday of Lent Cycle B – February 25, 2018

“Brilliant and Dazzling Beacon of Hope”

Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18
Psalm 116:10, 15, 16-17, 18-19
Romans 8:31b-34
Mark 9:2-10

“I believed, even when I said, ‘I am greatly afflicted.’” These are the first words of our Responsorial Psalm and they convey a great message and challenge of faith: our belief that, even in the worst of times, when most vulnerable and weak, God is with us. This is incredibly important especially in light of the events in the last couple of weeks. With police officers dying in the line of duty, Students and staff dying in schools, general discord in our country and so on, it is not too difficult to understand how we as a society and as individuals might feel “greatly afflicted”. But what about the other part from the Psalm, the part that says, “I believed, even when...”? How many of us here or around our city, country or world are struggling with that part? It’s not uncommon to hear comments like, “why would God let this happen if He is truly loving?” or “does God have my back?” or “Is there a God?” Our faith, it seems, is tested more times than we can often bare and the natural question we ask is “why?” I think that the underlying problem lies in the tension we all experience in our lives between reality and hope. Reality is what we experience now or what we experienced in the past; hope on the other hand always looks to the future and is never guaranteed. The basis of true faith lies in the ability to sustain and nurture hope in the promise of God in spite of or in cooperation with reality. In other words, hope is the acceptance of God’s promise and our hope in the promise of God is what guides us and strengthens us in times of troubles or affliction.

We see this in our First Reading from Genesis. Abraham is greatly afflicted and conflicted due to God’s request to sacrifice the son for which he had been waiting for 80 years or more. “Why would God, who finally gave me this gift of a son as the fulfillment of His promise, now ask me to sacrifice him?” After all, the hope of Abraham being the father of countless multitudes rests in and is manifested in his son Isaac. We can easily
imagine something like that going on in his head. Yet despite this, Abraham fully trusted that what God had promised would be fulfilled; it already had in the sense that Isaac was born of a barren mother and aged father as God promised. The faith of Abraham, based in hope, the acceptance of the promise of God, was rewarded by the sparing of his beloved son and fulfilled in a real way in the countless billions of people, present and past, who call Abraham their father in faith.

Likewise, in our gospel today, we see the hope of Jesus’ inner circle, Peter, James and John, sustained in the transfiguration of Jesus before their very eyes. To put this gospel in context, in the verses just prior to these, Jesus revealed to his disciple for the first time that He was going to suffer and die which scared and confused them all. They didn’t understand how this was possible if Jesus was in fact the Son of God as Peter just confessed. Their faith was faltering and fragile. Jesus renews their hope by giving them a glimpse of the glorified nature that Jesus and eventually they and all of us who believe, will experience in the Kingdom of God in heaven. In addition, the Father Himself affirms Jesus’ true identity when He very directly speaks to them from the cloud of His presence saying, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.” The disciples don’t know or fully understand what just happened there or what all of this means, but they do know and accept that God Himself has affirmed His promise of a Messiah, the Son of God who is Jesus. It is this experience of hope that will sustain them after Jesus’ Passion and death, in their time of affliction, and it will allow them to carry on Jesus’ mission and purpose here on earth with great and true faith.

We may not experience God or His messengers bursting in to our physical realities with words of caution or consolation like Abraham or the Apostles or see Christ standing before us in His transfigured glory but that doesn’t mean that He is not with us, especially in our affliction. In times of tragedy or trial, when it seems as though we have been abandoned or forsaken, it is then, through our faith, that we realize the love that God has for each and every one of us because He has been there too. God does not avoid our lowly human suffering; He embraced it and made it redemptive. It is in our times of suffering when we realize the importance of hope as the acceptance of God’s promise in our lives, because God’s promise is to join us to
Himself, just as He joined Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ. God is precisely present in our hope, for without God there IS no hope.

And this is why we are here. We gather together to share the hope of eternal life with each other but more importantly with the Trinity who is truly present, in our midst. The Word of God, the community of the faithful gathered to hear it and the Eucharist we will all share are the ways in which God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is present to strengthen us in our affliction and time of need. With true faith, we too can be reaffirmed with Hope.

This is the importance of the Transfiguration: to be reminded of the hope we have of our own glorification, shared with Christ through God’s love and mercy. Our afflications, physical, emotional or psychological, will all be wiped away and we will be made whole. This is why we hear these readings during the Lenten season, so that the hope of the transfigured Christ will help us in the transformation that we need in our lives to more fully accept and cooperate with the promise of God here on earth. In addition, the Transfiguration reminds us that our glorification will not happen without suffering in this life. It is however, our belief, born and nurtured in hope that will carry us through our suffering and affliction and allow us to be a beacon of hope to those around us. In this way we too have the power to transform and transfigure the world around us in the same way Christ did, so that we can be for others, a brilliant, dazzling and transfigured beacon of hope.