

Remember a few years back when the Derecho came through here. It you missed that it was winds with the force of a tornado but blowing in a straight line; it left most people without electricity for days. Without refrigeration food went bad, there were no lights, in the heat of summer there was no air conditioning and maybe most shocking for people there was no TV and no internet. It made you realize how much we just take for granted in our lives.

The second Sunday of Lent wants to remind us not to take God for granted; don't let him be just another item on our "to do list." *Let's see... I need to go to Home Depot, stop at Kroger's, go to church, have lunch somewhere...*

St Paul tells the Philippians that they should not be like the Pharisees who are overly concerned with Jewish dietary laws so that, as Paul say, "Their God is their belly." For them what marked them as an Israelite was their circumcision; something done to them, not something they did. The problem was that they were not allowing mystery, the mystical, to enter their lives.

The first reading today and the gospel want to remind us that there is a lot more to this world than the things on our "to do" list. The first reading is a bit shocking and a bit gory but the ancient world would have been familiar with the ritual of cutting an animal in half – it's what they did when they didn't have lawyers. People would act out a solemn agreement before all their neighbors. They would walk between the animal parts and announce that should they break their agreement may they suffer the same fate as these animals.

And should one person break the agreement the other could kill them without worrying about family and friends seeking revenge because this was bargain they made.

So we are talking about a solemn, binding agreement of the most serious kind. But this particular vision would leave them speechless. God himself – in the form of the blazing fire – binds himself to Abraham and his family BUT does not require that Abraham pass through the gauntlet. Knowing how frail human promises can be and the foreseeing the centuries of unfaithfulness yet to come, God does not demand the unfailing promise from the Jewish people but does bind himself to them. That God would take such a risk and make such a promise would be almost incomprehensible to them.

Have you ever had an experience that left you overwhelmed, speechless? Have you ever felt a presence, witnessed an event that mystified you, or just known that there was more going on than our materialistic neighbors want to admit? You aren't alone; you aren't crazy. About 75% of American report a having had an experience when they knew that, felt that. In life we do experience moments when we seem to be aware of more than what our eyes can take in.

We remember moments like that and how they felt and how we didn't really want to let them pass. That inner longing has a purpose. God placed it there to wake us to something beyond this world. You notice today that after the three disciples received a glimpse of Jesus' glory, they fell silent and did not tell anyone what they had seen. This is not because they were introverts. They were normally quite talkative - especially Peter - but they fall silent.

They saw something beyond words: a distant place, a future made present in Jesus.

It was both hard to express and easy to misunderstand. In fact, the transfiguration is a moment that the disciples won't talk about until after the resurrection. It's as if they experienced something that they weren't meant to see, or at least something for which they as yet had no words to describe.

Eventually they would talk about it but with very carefully thought out imagery that is especially clear in Luke's gospel. Notice particularly that Luke tells us Moses and Elijah were talking to Jesus about his "**exodus**, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." Certainly Moses more than anyone else would be able to talk with Jesus about an "exodus" -- so much wrapped up in that one word.

**Exodus** recalls the salvation of Israel on the night of the first **Passover** and the departure of the people from **slavery to freedom** as they passed through the Red Sea. By using this word Luke is suggesting that the death of Jesus, which will also occur on Passover, will set the people of God free again, this time from the slavery and bondage to our sins.

Why was Elijah the other person in the conversation? Jesus had recently been telling his disciple that the end was near. And just the day after this Transfiguration experience, Luke tells us "when the days drew near for him to be **taken up**, Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem".

In case you don't remember the story of Elijah, he was a great prophet who reached the end of his days but didn't die. In a fiery chariot Elijah was "taken up" by God to return again someday. It makes sense that it would be Elijah who would be talking with Jesus about his own impending "taking up" moment on the cross and it hints that he too would not simply die but return again.

It probably took a couple of decades before the disciples found words to hint at what they experienced: Moses, exodus, liberation, Elijah, escaping death, being taken up to God. Just as any awe inspiring experience usually leaves us speechless at first and only later are we able to give some inadequate hints at what it felt like. Those moments when the mystery, the mystical, makes itself known can transform our lives.

God wants his followers to transform the world. But we won't do that by merely performing certain external actions, like not eating pork or being circumcised, or simply coming to Church, showing up to get married, having our children baptized, receive communion or be confirmed. We transform the world when the mystery of God is reflected in us.

At a meeting of leading African catechists, they were discussing how to best to spread the Gospel. Various methods were suggested running from literature to videos to radio announcements. Finally, a young woman arose. She said, "*When we judge that a village is ready for the Lord Jesus, the first people we send in is a devout, determined Christian family. It is their lives that will inspire the villagers to think seriously about becoming Christian.*"

*They are better than a hundred books or videos or radio announcements.* Then she used this expression: She said ***“They will be the keyhole through which others will peer to see the Lord Christ. To spread the Church Christians must not so much promote as attract.”*** The woman's views carried the day.

We all need to be less concerned with devising ways for people to hear about the faith and more concerned living the faith in a way that attracts people to the faith. If someone were to ask any of us, “What exactly is a Catholic?” in what terms would we form our answer? If we were to answer the question in terms of religious practices, such as “a Catholic is a person who goes to Church on Sundays, receives the sacraments, says the Rosary, etc,” we would be giving far too much importance to what we do and not enough importance to the mystery of what God is doing. However, if we were to answer the question, “What is a Catholic?” in terms of what God does, if we were to say, “A Catholic is someone united to God in such a way that others experience the Mystery of God working in him,” then it is God and his works that are the essence of lives. Few people are drawn to Catholicism because they want to do the things that Catholics do. People are drawn to Catholicism because they want to experience God as Catholics experience Him. They want the mystery that changes lives.