

The Second Sunday of Lent March 13, 2022

Have you ever had the experience of someone telling you something very personal and secret about themselves? It may have been something tragic that happened to them that they had never shared with anyone else before. Or it may have been that they wanted to tell you how much they cared about you. When people reveal the secrets of their hearts to us, we can react in different ways. Sometimes, we might feel embarrassed and not know what to say. We might even feel afraid and wonder where the person is going with these personal revelations. Or we can feel touched that the person thought so highly of us to make themselves vulnerable. We might even admire their courage in sharing something so personal.

Now, have you ever had the experience of wanting someone to tell you something but they just weren't ready to? This often happens between parents and their children. Parents see their children struggling or not being themselves and they ask, "Is everything okay?" And what answer does the child typically give? "I'm fine." But the parents know the child is anything but fine. And it just seems that the more the parent presses, the less willing the child is to talk. All the parents can do is wait until the child is ready to share with them whatever is going on.

People share secrets with us because they trust us and want to deepen their friendship with us. At the same time, people we are already close to might not be ready to share what is going on inside their hearts with us. It is not that they don't care about us, they just need time. In the end, we cannot force anyone to reveal themselves to us. They have to do it when the time is right and when they are ready.

In today's readings, God reveals Himself to people in unique and unusual ways.

In today's first reading, we hear how God made a promise to Abram to give him descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. When Abram asks God to give him a sign that all this will truly happen, God puts together the bizarre ritual we read about. He has Abram cut a heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtledove and a pigeon in two and place them on the ground. It sounds strange to us, but in the time of the Old Testament, this

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was a common way that people formed covenants. That is, it was the way that people formed unbreakable ties with each other. They would rip animals in half, pass in between them, and swear, "If I ever break this covenant, may I be ripped apart like these animals." That was the type of promise that God was willing to make with Abram.

So, Abram sets everything up as God told him to, and then what happens? God does not show up right away. Rather, He makes Abram wait. In fact, Abram has to fight off vultures who try to swoop down and eat the animals he had killed. It is only after darkness has fallen that God reveals Himself as a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch.

What is God trying to teach Abram and also teach us? That He reveals Himself to us when the time is right, when He is ready. God is not available "on demand" for us. He does not answer our prayers the way a butler or a maid would answer the command of their master. Rather, God always remains free. He hears our prayers and He is willing to help us because He is a good Father. But it is up to Him to choose how and when He will answer us.

This is so important for our lives as followers of Jesus Christ. Prayer is not magic. It is not a way of conjuring up God. Rather, it is a way of opening ourselves up to His presence and action in our lives. Prayer is not about getting God to do our will but about making us better able to do His will. He is the Lord. He is the Master. He is the One calling the shots, not us. He promises to give us everything we need, but on His schedule not ours.

That brings us to today's gospel. Jesus reveals Himself to Peter, John, and James in a way that He had never done before. He allows them to see His glory as the Son of God shining through His human nature. It was an amazing and unforgettable sight, one that filled them with awe and fear. Without a doubt, it would have been the most incredible thing that Peter, John, and James had ever seen up to that time.

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How does Peter react to it all? He wants to hold on to the moment. He never wants it to end, so he tells Jesus that he is going to put up some tents so that Jesus, Moses, Elijah, and the rest of them could camp out on the mountain taking in the beauty of what was happening to them.

Peter is expressing here a sentiment that so many of us have when we experience something beautiful. We want to hold on to it. We don't want it to end. How many times have we been somewhere with the people we loved and wished we never had to leave? But, it is not possible. And it is especially not possible for people of faith.

Many times we have moments in prayer when we feel enveloped in the loving presence of God. Our hearts are so filled with light and peace that we think we're going to burst. Or we might be at a Mass where our minds seem as though they are caught up into Heaven. Those are graced and blessed moments when God reveals Himself and His love to us.

Our reaction many times is to try to hold on to those moments or try to recreate them. Like Peter, we want to camp out in those sweet feelings. But we can't. The fact is that God does not want us to be focused on ourselves and our feelings. Rather, He wants us to go out and share those experiences with others. Like Peter, James, and John, we have to eventually come down from the mountain so that we can go out and serve others. God's blessings are not meant for us to keep to ourselves but to spread around.

God indeed wants to reveal Himself to us. He wants a personal, deep relationship with us. But, that relationship will always be on His terms, not on ours. Nonetheless, He is gentle with us. He understands how hard it is for us to believe at times. He understands that we need encouragement along the way, so He gives us moments when we feel His presence strongly. While He wants us to enjoy those moments, He also wants to step out of those places of comfort to share with others the love He has so generously shown us.