20 Homily for the Second Sunday of the Lenten Season Year A

12 March 2017

Gen 12:1-4; 2 Tim 1:8-10; Mt 17:1-9

During a speech on Valentine’s Day, Pope Francis, addressing the couples, mentioned that there is no such thing as a perfect family, perfect husband or perfect wife. Then he said “I won’t even mention a perfect mother-in-law.” He further said that this perfectionist culture that we live in has brought about a “throw away” culture which dictates to us that “if anything is not perfect, discard it immediately and then to always expect something new.” So when this disease of “perfectionism” infects us, we seek and search always for a “perfect” friend, spouse, children, parents, family, church, priest, parish, work place, anything but imperfect. This obsession with “perfectionism” in society leads us to celebrate “success”, pleasure and physical beauty as the ultimate goals in life.

The Gospel today beautifully offers us the best Christian remedy, the best panacea for this disease of “perfectionism.” The transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor tells us that there are two distinct moments in our lives; two distinct realities. First is the “top-of-the-mountain moment” where we see a shining light, the radiance of God and the interior illumination which inspires us to linger around and even pitch a tent as Peter suggested, to dwell in that perfect moment. The second moment is the “foot-of-the-mountain moment” where we experience the messiness in our lives, moments of disarray, moments of our weaknesses and the moments of our own struggling sinfulness. Let us remember that the foretaste of that “perfect” moment; that flashing perfect moment with God is given to us not to loiter around and to stay there indefinitely in that perfect moment but to draw inspiration, courage and grace from that perfect moment with God to live out the second moment where most of real life is spent.

This is the call to discipleship. Soon after the transfiguration as they came down from the mountain, in the same chapter of the Matthean Gospel, Jesus gets to the nitty-gritty of life. Jesus reminds them about his passion and death. He points to the cross. He reminds his disciples that they need to get to the “foot-of-the-mountain” experience not the “top-of-the-mountain” experience. It is here we see our sinfulness as grace-generating moments. That is why the Jesuit Indian spiritual writer Tony de Mello paradoxically said, “Be grateful for your sins. They are carriers of grace.” We can’t experience the fruits of transfiguration as far as we decide to stay on the mountain top. We have come down from the mountain as we really are. Richard Rohr, the Franciscan friar sees this climbing down from the mountain as follows: “You can’t come to God by doing it right – you come to God by doing it wrong, otherwise, you don’t fall in love with God, you fall in love with yourself.” Let us come as we are before him, with our imperfections; because that is how He wants us.