

CELEBRATE LENT

Sunday, Second Week of Lent

**Those who practice forbearance
will not allow the trials of life to stifle their joy and zest for life.**

Genesis 22:1-3, 9-13, 15-18

We read the moving story of Abraham and Isaac journeying in faith, which was so intense as to surpass human logic. Abraham was called to do the impossible – to sacrifice his only son, to destroy his only hope for descendants. Abraham obeyed, surrendered! His unwavering faith was rewarded far beyond anything he could envision. **In his surrender to God's will, he became truly free - one with God's Will.** Abraham's call and response have become models for every other call. Like him, we are called again and again to leave the safe and familiar, the sound and the sane, to venture into territories unknown, uncharted, and unsure.

Letting go is not easy and to let go of a sure and certain and secure thing in order to welcome something new and untried is even more difficult. And that is the challenge that Abraham offers us today!

Psalms 116

This is a Psalm of gratitude and praise. Our poet has experienced anguish, suffering to the point of death – perhaps, physical illness or may be a nervous breakdown. The “snares of death” and the “pangs of Sheol” took hold of him and he called on the Lord and the Lord answered. He is now immensely grateful for healing. So, he begins: I love you Lord! He meditates: how can I thank the Lord for his abundant blessings! “I will witness to those around me that it is the Lord who saves” and “I will pay my vows to Him”. There is nothing more to do than to say, “Thank you, Lord”.

**I will offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord,
and call on the name of the Lord.
I will pay my vows to the Lord,
in the presence of all his People.**

Romans 8:31-34

St. Paul tells us that God's love has no limits and that nothing can separate us from that love. Paul assures us that God is “FOR US”. Given that support, who can be against us?

This assurance becomes empowering when the daily struggles of conversion, commitment and faithfulness cause us to lose focus. Our faith journey and the challenge of Gospel living will bring hardship and struggle. Paul tells us that our security is in the gift of God's Grace, His unfailing, steadfast Love. God's Grace will empower us to bear our share of hardship for the Gospel.

Reflect on: God is "FOR US" and "Nothing" can separate us from the Love of God!

Mark 9:2-10

We hear the voice of God declaring Jesus as the "beloved Son" and calling all disciples to listen to him. In the presence of Jesus, transfigured in glory, Peter, James and John felt secure, happy, at home. They felt they had reached the end of their journey and they were not ready to move on - they just wanted to stay in their experience of comfort, joy, security, and glory.

They had found, in the transfigured glory of Jesus a temporary serenity and security. But the journey of Jesus was not complete, and the disciple's journey was not complete either. They had to leave this experience, come down the mountain and accept life with all its joys and sorrows, even accept the cross and eventual death.

They had to continue their journey into the unknown, uncertain, and insecure future. They had to walk in mystery! The journey of Jesus would take him to the cross and then to unending glory. His disciples must follow and travel a similar path. On their way, Jesus would serve as their map, their route, their guide and eventually their way - and the way, the journey and the end of the journey become one.

Reflect on being grateful and rejoicing in experiences of joy, success, greatness, wonder, glory, happiness - all of life's peak experiences. These experiences will empower us to live our life more fully and joyfully. Be grateful!

Reflect also on being prepared to come down the mountain and accept the inconveniences, suffering, pain, cross - all of life's struggles. Stand strong in faith during difficult times. Take time - be patient - discern your trials.

Saint of the Day, February 25 - Blessed Sebastian of Aparicio and 15 other saints are remembered this day.

Sebastian de Aparicio y del Prado was born on January 20, 1502 in the Galician region of Spain. He was the third child and only son of Juan de Aparicio and Teresa del Prado, who were poor, but pious peasants, and spent his childhood tending sheep and cattle. He learned his prayers from his parents, but had no schooling, and was not able to read or write.

When Aparicio was older, he sought work outside his region in order to help support his family and to provide dowries for his sisters. He finally decided to improve his fortune by traveling to the newly conquered Americas. He sailed from Spain, landing in Veracruz later that year and settled in Puebla. Aparicio began to cultivate indigenous maize but also European wheat. He was one of the first Spaniards who raised and trained cattle to use in plow farming and transportation. Realizing the difficulty of transporting supplies in Mexico, and between growing Spanish settlements, he promoted building roads and a highway to connect the silver mining city of Zacatecas with Mexico City. . He established the transport system which sent agricultural products to Spain and brought necessary items to the residents of New Spain.

Aparicio prospered, becoming a wealthy man. He, however, had never lost his commitment to a life of faith. He followed a very ascetic way of life, sleeping on the ground and eating the poorest foods. His charity extended to all, giving much of his wealth to those in need, and lending money without asking anything in return. Eventually feeling pressured to marry, at the age of 60 he became engaged to a young woman who had no hopes of finding a husband, due to her lack of a dowry. They agreed to practice a white marriage, not consummating the union. Though she was much younger, his wife died a year later. He married again two years after that, with the same arrangement, only to lose his second wife by the time he was 70.

Shortly after being widowed for the second time, Aparicio grew seriously ill and began to re-assess his life. Feeling a call to enter the consecrated life, he frequently visited the Franciscan friars and finally decided to apply to the friars to be admitted as a lay brother. He received the religious habit of a friar on June 9, 1574, at the age of 72 and made his profession of religious vows on June 13, 1575. As he was still illiterate, his document of commitment had to be signed by a fellow friar, Alfonso Peinado.

At the friary, over the course of the following year, he held the offices of cook, sacristan, gardener and porter. He also was assigned to be the quaestor of the community, the one assigned to travel throughout the local community, seeking food and alms for the upkeep of the friars and those who came to them for help. The builder of Mexico's highway system had become a beggar on it. Aparicio was given an oxcart with two oxen to travel through the city and the surrounding villages. He lived on the road for days, sleeping on the ground under the cart in bad weather. He would spend his time meditating on the Passion and on the teachings and example of St. Francis of Assisi. He spent the last 26 years of his life in this way. On the evening of February 25, 1600, Aparicio asked to be laid on the ground to meet his death, in imitation of St. Francis. He soon died in the arms of a fellow Galician, Friar Juan de San Buenaventura, with his last word being "Jesus". Sebastian was beatified in 1787 and is known as a patron of travelers.

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