

Year A Second Sunday of Lent (Feb. 17, 2008)

Gn 12:1-4a; Ps 33; 2 Tm 1:8b-10; Mt 17:1-9

It does not seem very easy to see the common thread running through today's readings, but perhaps we can look at the first reading from Genesis and the gospel reading as bookends, the beginning and the end of "salvation history." Last week we spoke about the story of the Bible as summed up by the word "exile": original sin caused us to be banished from God's very presence, from Paradise, where he walked among us (cf. Gn 3:8; Lv 26:11-13; Ez 37:20-28). The other side of exile is exodus, going out of the state of alienation sin brings into God's Promise, initially understood as land and offspring, as in what Abraham was promised in today's reading (see also Gn 17:1-8). In the time before Jesus, pious Jewish groups understood the end of "exile" not merely as a geographical change, but as salvation; this is best illustrated by Dn 9. In the New Testament, all of God's promises are fulfilled in Christ, 2 Cor 1:20. Luke understands these promises as consisting primarily in the Holy Spirit (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4-5) and Jesus' resurrection (Acts 13:32-33; 26:4-8), in which we will share.

Abraham marks the beginning of salvation history in the sense that the "primordial history" (Gn 1-11) is over, full of cosmic and mythological motifs as it is, such that the Bible begins now to tell about a specific man and the people he will father. But Abraham is also a model: he leaves the exile of Babylon ("Ur of the Chaldeans") to go to the "land of the promise" (see Heb 11:9). But he is only a pilgrim, a resident alien (Hebrew *ger*) there, with no fixed abode. He represents our condition before Christ, before the final exodus into salvation. Heb 11:39-40 teaches that no one would enter into the Promise before Christ.

Who made the final exodus, blazing a new path (Heb 10:19-20) to God for us? Jesus. In the Lucan version of the Transfiguration, what Moses and Elijah are talking about with Jesus is indeed, in Greek, his *exodus* (Lk 9:31). We can also understand today's gospel in this manner: the disciples get a glimpse of the glory that awaits Jesus after his Passion, predictions of which flank the Transfiguration episode. It is the glory of the final exodus, of reaching God's very presence, of returning to Paradise (as Jesus promised the "Good Thief" in Lk 23:43). This is what the second reading teaches.