

The Second Sunday in Lent

March 20, 2011

Homily by: Thomas Graf

TWO MEN.....TWO MEN who are up there in years.....TWO MEN who are touched by the Lord.....TWO MEN who take a LEAP OF FAITH.....

ABRAM (Whose name means—High, Exalted, Good---FATHER) whose name is later changed to ABRAHAM (FATHER of a MULTITUDE---FATHER of MANY.)

What do we know about ABRAM's background? NOT MUCH! We do know that his ancestors were idolaters...his father was TERAH---and in Jewish MIDRASH tradition tells that he was an IDOLMAKER. There is even a MIDRAH STORY which talks about how TERAH went off on a journey and left ABRAM in charge of the warehouse. When he returned, he found all the IDOLS smashed to bits...except for one that was standing with a hammer in his hand. TERAH asked ABRAM what had happened, and he responded that while he was away, the idols got into a fight about WHO WAS THE GREATEST...and he won. TERAH said---how can that be? They are only made of stone. ABRAM responded, then why do you believe in them?

What about ABRAM's PERSONAL QUALITIES? Nothing in detail...except that without prior warning, he was called to ABANDON homeland and KINDRED, to ENTRUST his destiny to God's guidance and to set out for an UNDISCLOSED DESTINATION with nothing more than a DIVINE PROMISE to rely on..and all at 75 years of age. To EXCHANGE THE KNOWN FOR THE UNKNOWN.

A MAN....A MAN up there in years...A MAN touched by the Lord...A MAN who took a LEAP OF FAITH.

NICODEMUS.....a prominent JEW at the time of Christ....according to JOSEPHUS....Nicodemus was the name of one of the AMBASSADORS sent to POMPEY. He was a Pharisee, probably in his 70's...a LEADER of the Jews. Even during his interview with Jesus....Jesus refers to him as a teacher (Master) of Israel. One who was apparently touched by Jesus' teachings and seeks him out. And...later....at the time of Jesus' TRIAL...Nicodemus offers a word in Jesus' defense to the SANHEDRIN.....More so, at the time of Jesus' death, he and Joseph of Arimatheus REVERENCE Jesus' body for the Tomb.

A MAN....A MAN up there in years....A MAN touched by the LORD .....A MAN who takes a LEAP OF FAITH.

Both were probably quite content with their lives...where they were...at that time in their lives when they should be able to SIT BACK, RELAX and ENJOY!!! NEW VENTURES???? NEW CAREERS???? MOVE FROM MY HOME???? (That I had just PAID OFF!!!) CHANGE MY WAY OF THINKING????(Abram—polytheist.....NICODEMUS---devout JEWISH LEADER)...BELIEVING???? LEAD OTHERS????

Yet, we are told that: "Abraham went as the Lord had told him."

The author portrays ABRAHAM as wholly at God's disposal and TOTALLY OBEDIENT to his will. How did Abraham feel as he wrenched himself from his familiar surroundings? What were his THOUGHTS/QUESTIONS/FEARS??? But...the author is SILENT on all these matters. Just that he had UNRESERVED TRUST IN THE DIVINE WORD.

At a later time in HEBREWS we hear: "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance, and he went out NOT KNOWING WHERE HE WAS TO GO.

Upon reflecting about Abraham's faith...and venturing forth...even though he did not know where....I was taken back to an experience many years ago.

As many of you know....in a FORMER LIFE....I drove a cab in NY. For me, that 5 year experience itself (4 years in college and 1 year afterwards part-time—I made more \$ driving cab than teaching) taught me much about God/faith. I drove a PRIVATE Cab in the Bronx—884-8888----people call and you pick them up.....I will never forget one fare that I picked up regularly. It was a woman....a very...well....let me say..."interesting" woman.....perhaps a bit eccentric.....Apparently the other cab drivers did not fair too well with her, because I was the one that usually was given the call. She would get into the cab, and she never told you straight out where she was going. She just said..."Turn right here....turn left there....etc..." As it turned out she usually went to one of three places: 1. A PARK 2. A Store 3. TO VISIT A FRIEND. The thing was...you then had to wait for her and take her back. I didn't mind, because I was in school, and I could do homework, etc. She never said much, except for the directions...HOWEVER, I will never forget one day when she handed me the fare-\$ and said "You know....I may not always seem to know where I am going, but you always take me there." At the time I guess I thought to myself---OK LADY...JUST GIVE ME THE \$ AND GET OUT OF MY CAB....However, years later that experience has come back many times....Upon REFLECTION...the words take on NEW LIFE/MEANING.

Is not that the case with many lessons we learn in life???? Something is said, but it takes time to PROCESS.....TO TRULY UNDERSTAND.

I would imagine that was the case with ABRAHAM.....Leave UR? Have a child at 80?...Did the fullness of God's promise sink in from the beginning? Or, was it a PROCESS???.....NICODEMUS ... ..did Jesus' message take hold completely from the beginning?

If we look at the DIALOGUE between Jesus and Nicodemus we see JOHN (Evangelist) presenting a PROCESS:

1. Jesus makes a statement (Need to be born from above)
2. It is misunderstood (Nicodemus hears "Need to be born again" Go back into the womb?)
3. Jesus offers clarification
4. This leads to further miscomprehension.
5. A final revelation of Jesus

It is a PROCESS.....a PROCESS WHICH LEADS US INTO THE LIGHT.

We have to be BORN OF WATER AND SPIRIT.....to receive the LIGHT OF CHRIST.

BAPTISM---We will shortly celebrate the NEW LIFE of CAMRON CHARLES.....I am sure it has been a PROCESS for his parents....Charles and Melissa.....and the PROCESS will continue.

This is a NEW BEGINNING for Camron.....who knows what lies ahead? His parents step out in faith.....HOPING (Not SEEING---FAITH) for God's BLESSING/PROMISE as his and their LIVES unfold.

BAPTISM---NEW LIFE---However, though it COMMENCES with BAPTISM.....it is not a ONCE AND FOR ALL EVENT.....it is a PROCESS. THIS PRECIOUS LIFE must continue to be NOURISHED in ONGOING....LIFE-GIVING RELATIONSHIP....COMMUNION with JESUS. THIS relationship is PURE GIFT---only the SPIRIT can TRULY give us EYES TO SEE----FAITH!!!

ABRAHAM.....NICODEMUS.....TWO MEN.....TWO MEN WHO ARE UP THERE IN YEARS.....TWO MEN WHO ARE TOUCHED BY THE LORD.....TWO MEN WHO MUST TAKE A LEAP OF FAITH.....

ALL IS PROCESS.....BASED ON FAITH!

“NOW FAITH IS THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR, THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN.”

May we continually open ourselves (NO MATTER HOW OLD, HOW YOUNG, HOW SETTLED, OR DISPERSED, HOW SECURE, or HOW FEARFUL.) to that GRACED GIFT OF FAITH....which allows us to JOURNEY FORWARD.....even when WE MAY NOT SEEM TO KNOW WHERE WE ARE GOING.....FOR OUR MOST PRECIOUS AND GRACIOUS LORD WILL TAKE US THERE....IF WE CAN BUT PUT OUR FAITH IN THE LORD! AMEN!