

2nd Sunday of Lent cycle A

One of the world's ultimate ego-busters is the time-honored tradition of picking teams: everyone line up, and back and forth both sides choose, until they get down to pretty much me. But right up there with picking teams on the playground must be elections: only one gets chosen, and the rest get rejected—and by lots and lots of people. From American Idol to best men and maids of honor, life is a succession of sometimes being picked, and sometimes being passed over.

Sometimes people are chosen because they are liked, sometimes because they are competent, sometimes because they are well connected; but almost always when chosen, something is then expected of them. The best man and maid of honor get to make the toast; but they also *have* to make the toast—and the best man better make everybody laugh, and the maid of honor better make everybody cry. The scholarship student better perform; the actor who wins the role better be convincing; the politician, better deliver for his constituents. For various activities, people are chosen all the time. But almost always, with the choosing comes the expectations of them.

In the first reading today from Genesis, we are presented with Abram, and his being chosen by God. God desires for Abram to be the father of a great nation, of God's own people; Abram is blessed, and is also to be a blessing—and will become the standard of blessing for future generations. He will be a blessing to others, inasmuch as he will bring about God's will for his people; and he will be the standard of blessing, meaning that if we are blessed, it will look like Abram's life did when he found favor with God. And what did Abram's life look like after God so purposefully chose him? God right away wanted Abram to leave his home and family—"go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and your father's house to a land that I will show you," God said to him. God told Abram to trust in his plan, even beyond human reason. God wanted Abram to trust that he would be a father to a great nation even though his wife was barren and always had been, and was beyond her child-bearing years anyhow. God desired for Abram to wait and wait and wait for the fulfillment of his promises; to never stop believing, to never lose hope, but to constantly keep trusting that God would be true to his word, and that he had the power to be true to his word. God not only wanted to give to Abram; from the moment he called Abram, he was asking for faith in return.

And so on this second Sunday of Lent, we are reminded that we, like Abram, have been chosen by God. We are blessed that God has invited us into this relationship with him; and we are a blessing to others, because part of being a child of God is to be used as an instrument of his will in his world. God loves all of the souls he creates, and he desires for all men to be saved, but those who are specially chosen through baptism are called to do even more, mostly so that the Good News of the Gospel may go out to the whole world, not just stop with us. He called us by name; and now he has expectations of us. Jesus has redeemed us; he came to save us, to serve us. But when we are chosen, we can be sure that it's not solely to be served, but to serve. This is at

the crux of every vocation: the priest serves his parish, the bishop his flock; the husband lays down his life for his wife, the wife loves her husband, parents sacrifice for children. Nobody is called to selfishness; in fact, selfishness is the antithesis of Christian living. In washing us in the waters of baptism, God has certainly blessed us. But now, we are called not only to be blessed but to be a blessing to others, an instrument of God's will to show his love for the poor, the powerless, the helpless, the needy, the sick, the lonely. When God picks us to be on his team, it is a totally free gift. But it is not a gift without any expectations; in fact, we can and should expect that the expectations will be quite huge.

My friends, we have something to do. All of us have something to do to help build up the Mystical Body and to help bring about the kingdom. If we have jobs, we know that we have something to do: our bosses expect us to give them so many hours in exchange for pay, we are expected to provide a quality product or service that will bring people back to purchase from us again. If we are members of a family, we have something to do: perhaps to bring home a paycheck, perhaps to run a household, perhaps just to continue to explore the world in our own back yard. And so if we are members of the mystical body of Christ, we have something to do, for none of us has been called solely for the purpose of being served by others. This is part of the sacrament of maturity, of Confirmation; it isn't about chronological age, but about our talents and our abilities and our gifts. If we belong to something, we should have to ask ourselves: what is my contribution? Three questions we should pose to ourselves in looking at our relationship with the Church: one: what are my aptitudes? Because if you're someone who can't carry a tune in a bucket, then God likely isn't calling you to sing in the choir. But if you sing like an angel? Then you'd better think about why you would ever hold back such a gift rather than use it to inspire your fellow Christians and above all, to give glory to God. Second question: what are my inclinations? Because God is good, and he plays fair; he will call us to that which we not only can do, but which we most likely like to do. We need the lawn mowed and the CCD students taught; the appeal of one task will be clear to one, but simply lost on someone else. Thirdly, what needs to be done? Because here is where God's call can get pretty loud: if we can do it, and we enjoy doing it, and it needs to be done, then we are likely being called. And all of this has to do with having been blessed by God, because the blessing comes out of our having been chosen by God—not to be served, but to become servants. Servants of him, servants of others, servants like his Son who could have ordered that mankind wait on him hand and foot when he came, but who instead chose to lead by example, and serve us. On Calvary, he served our need for salvation; through the cross, he quenched our thirst for lasting treasures.

The Gospel today was the story of the Transfiguration, in which three disciples are given a glimpse of Jesus' glory, the glory we will share in one day. And look at the immediate reaction of Peter: "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah." In other words, let's do something to lay claim to this miracle; let

us react as well as receive. During Lent, we celebrate the fact that we have been called to receive; yet let us not kid ourselves, we have been called to react now, too. We have been elected by God to sanctify the world—to show our neighbors and our co-workers what the Christian life looks like, and to show them that we love it. We have been picked to be God’s instruments of mercy, and compassion, and peace; yet also his instruments of challenge. We have been called to proclaim the kingdom, and also to build up the kingdom by building up his Church on earth: starting with our parish, but not stopping here. And as we see with all of those whom God chooses, these works are not only desirable: they are expected of us. After God blessed Abram, he went as the Lord directed him; after Jesus showed his glory to his disciples, they came down from the mountain and continued their movement towards the Last Supper, and towards Calvary. As we journey on through Lent, the questions faced by them are now being faced by us: where, Lord, do you want me to go? Who, Lord, do you want me to serve? What, Lord, do you call me to do? We have been chosen; now, let us go forth and be a blessing upon God’s world.

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