

## Second Sunday of Lent

Year A, 2026

Gen 12:1-4a

2 Tim 1:8b-10

Ps 33

Mt 17:1-9

### *Prayer is necessary*

Without prayer, the Christian life quickly becomes a series of obligations, duties that must be performed, rites that must be observed, rules that must be followed.

Without prayer, the Christian life is dull, and dry, and empty.

Without prayer, the Christian life is soon enough neglected and even rejected.

By prayer, here, I mean a desire for God, to know God, to understand the ways of God, to be about the things of God, to be with God, in God's company, aware, attentive, alert to the presence of God always, everywhere and at all times. This desire for God – a desire that, by the way, it written into every human heart – must be acted upon, or else it will atrophy. Unexercised, unused, the desire for God will wither and grow limp and lifeless.

Prayer – call it how you will – meditation, contemplation, reflection, mindfulness, awareness, consciousness – is our putting into action our inborn desire for God. Prayer is by nature an activity. It is not something passive. It is intentional and deliberate, a decisive act to seek out and to encounter God, who is ready and willing to reveal himself to those who are ready and willing to meet him, find him, know him, be in his presence.

This is what Jesus taught his most intimate disciples – Peter, James, and John – as he led them up a high mountain by themselves. One does not go up a mountain by accident. One does it with intention, deliberately. Walking up a mountain path takes effort and determination. On mountain heights, there are no ready resources necessary for human survival. All that we need is down below in the valleys and plains. As a practical matter, as a matter for physical survival, mountains are better avoided. They are hard, dangerous places. Beautiful, but hard. Even today.

Nowadays, and in the days of Jesus and even earlier in the days of the patriarchs and prophets, people went up mountains for spiritual reasons. The mountain offers views and perspectives that stun and amaze, that inspire and awe. On the heights, we see more clearly, we understand more deeply. The mountain view reveals what before had been hidden: unseen, unknown, unfelt. But now, on the mountain, we see; we know; we feel. And we are never the same.

As a spiritual endeavor, prayer is a journey up a mountain. It takes effort, commitment, time. It is hard going at times. You have to stop and rest, catch your breath, and then start moving again. At some point, you'll likely want to stop and give up, wondering if it's worth the trouble, the time, the weariness. On the way up, sometimes the landscape is dull and uninspiring. Sometimes, distracted or uncertain, you wander off the true path and then you have to struggle to get back on track.

So as a practical matter, mountains are best avoided. But here's the problem: we are not purely practical creatures. We are spiritual creatures, who desire spiritual things, who need spiritual things. And prayer – of which the mountain is a symbol – is the key to finding the spiritual resources that we need to survive spiritually, that is, with meaning, purpose, and identity, all of which are revealed on the mountain heights, in prayer.

On the mountain, Jesus is transfigured before his disciples, revealing to them something they could never have imagined for themselves. The mountain view – what they beheld – held them entranced. Their words hardly made sense, except that they knew that what they were privileged to be a part of was “good,” and they were glad to be there, and they wanted to remain there: a tent for Jesus, and one for Moses and another for Elijah.

Moses had his own mountain encounters with the Almighty (Ex 3). While tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, Moses looked upon the heights of Mt Horeb, where he saw a bush on fire, but the fire did not consume the bush. Up the mountain he went, turning aside from his flock-keeping, to investigate the sight. There God spoke to him for the first time, revealing himself as “*the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,*” the great “*I AM.*” Encountering the Holy One, Moses removed the sandals from his feet. This was holy ground.

Later, after he had led the people of Israel out of Egypt, Moses had another encounter with God (Ex 24) on the same mountain, now

called Sinai. God commanded Moses to come up to him on the mountain, a mountain covered by a great cloud, representing the glory and mystery of God. And on that mountain and in that cloud, Moses remained for *forty days and nights*, alone with God, who revealed the commandments meant for the instruction of Israel – how they were to be his people and he their God. The mountain encounter with the Almighty.

Then, centuries later, there was the prophet Elijah (1 Kg 19), who journeys *forty days and nights* to reach Horeb, “*the mountain of God.*” He climbs the heights and takes shelter alone in a cave. Waiting, waiting ... the word of the Lord comes to him, asks him a question, speaks his name: “*Why are you here, Elijah?*” Why have you come all this way, alone? What do you seek? What do you want? Elijah explains: Lord, my *zeal* for you, my *desire* for you and your holiness and your righteousness have brought me here to this place. Then God reveals himself to his chosen prophet – not in the strong and violent wind that swept the mountain and crushed the rocks; not in the earthquake that shook the foundations of the earth; not in a fire that blazed and burned and consumed all it touched; but in a “*tiny whispering sound*” – like the rustling of a breeze. Elijah covered his face with his cloak and stepped out of the cave, standing at its opening, looked out over the mountain view, and again, God asked him, called him by name: “*Why are you here, Elijah?*” And a second time, Elijah explained his zeal, his desire for the holiness and righteousness of God.

The disciples' vision of the Jesus's transfiguration transformed them, and forever after they would carry with them the memory and the mystery of that mountain encounter with the Holy One. What they witnessed was the reward of their going up the mountain with Jesus. They put in the effort, the work; God gave the reward. They desired to be with Jesus, to know God, to see his glory; and God fulfilled that desire, revealing himself in the Father (the voice), and in the Son (Jesus), and in the Holy Spirit (the bright cloud). They prayed; God answered. What they received was so far beyond what they gave, for God will not be outdone in generosity. *"What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him, this God has revealed to us through the Spirit"* (1 Cor 2:9-10). Those who love him must pursue him. They must ascend the mountain. They must pray.

I hope you have understood me and noticed that I am not talking about prayers, but about prayer, about praying. Who can pray? Anyone who can walk up a mountain path. A little child can pray, and sincerely. A teenager can pray, and deeply. In adulthood or in old age, we can pray. Each in his or her own way, we pray. And if we truly want to know God and to encounter God, then we *must* pray. Alone and with others. In silence and reflection. In thought and by desire. "For me," wrote St Thérèse of Lisieux, "prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven; it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy" (CCC 2558).

*Prayer* is the walk up the mountain. *Encounter* is what God reveals on the mountain, that is, during prayer. *Encounter* is what we are seeking. *Prayer* is the way to find it. Without prayer, which is our desire for God put into action, encounter is unlikely. God has already taken the first step, made the first move: he has written into our hearts a desire for him, a desire that draws us toward him. We respond to that desire – through prayer – or we do not. We answer with effort and determination or with apathy and neglect. Prayer is putting our inborn desire for God into action.

Without prayer, the Word of God, the Mass, the Eucharist, the Church, will leave me bored and indifferent.

Without prayer, no homily in the world will move me.

Without your own efforts and endeavors at prayer, no word spoken or song sung or deed done will inspire me.

Unless and until I take decisive action to set out, like Moses did, like Elijah did, like Jesus did, each of them spending forty days and nights seeking and desiring to be in the presence of God, then I am not praying, and if I am not praying, then I will fail to see, to know, to feel, to experience the *encounter* with the Holy One that my inmost being, by design, has been created for and awaits with “*inexpressible groanings*” (Rom 8:26). So I pray, that God may reveal himself to me, and in that encounter, I may know the transforming goodness of God, who “*has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of Jesus Christ*” (2 Cor 4:6). Amen.