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COME SPIRIT!!

2 Lent B-2003 THEME: The Plan

I am a bit of a science fiction fan, just a bit. I like two old series now just in reruns: Babylon 5 and Star Trek Deep Space 9. Unlike most of TV, religion serves a vital role in each of these series. Each series also has a five or seven plan for the universe. Separate episodes might each add something to the total picture, but that picture isn't realized until the conclusion of the series.

But Babylon 5 and Star Trek Deep Space 9 are just fiction, enjoyable, yes, but really rather meaningless fiction in the long run of things.

God had a far longer and infinitely deeper plan for the universe. The plan was formulated for all eternity but radically altered when the key player in the plan, mankind, chose to deviate from the intention of the Creator. Man chose not-God, sin. The world was devastated by the rejection of its Creator. Evil entered the world both in the hideous person of Satan and the equally hideous acts of sinful men. But God did not give up on his plan. Mankind was entrusted with creation, and would remain entrusted with creation. God's plan for mankind, though, would have to take a new course. Evil would have to be defeated. Man's selfishness would have to be replaced with Sacrificial Love. The Second Person of the Trinity would initiate the transformation of the world by becoming a man and by sacrificing himself.

The gospel for the second Sunday of Lent is always one of the accounts of the Transfiguration of the Lord. This year it is from the Gospel of Mark. Jesus climbs the mountain with

Peter, James and John and somehow miraculously changed:
his

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clothes become white and face radiant. Our focus, though, should not be on the change in the Lord but on what takes place while the Lord is changed. The Lord enters into a deep conversation with Moses and Elijah. Moses, the giver of the Ten Commandments represents the Books of the Law or Torah in the Bible. Elijah, the greatest of the prophets represents all prophecy of the Hebrew Scriptures.

What was this deep conversation all about? It had to be about God's plan for mankind as it was developed in the Law and the Prophets. Moses and Elijah discussed the Word of God with the Word that had become flesh, Jesus Christ.

Of course the disciples got it all wrong. They were concerned with the change in the Lord. Jesus was concerned with the discussion: he was to die and then rise from the dead. The disciples were told to keep this event quiet until after the resurrection.

During Lent we pray the Stations of the Cross. That has always been a custom of my family. I feel the stations are a central devotion during Lent and have fostered this prayer in my parishes offering two opportunities for mediating on the Way of the Cross the Friday's of Lent and a wonderful prayer service led by the youth of the parish on Good Friday.

The reason why I foster this devotion is because the stations of the cross unite the execution of God's plan, Divine Sacrificial Love, to his plan for our lives.

We are all part of this grand scheme of things, you know. We are all part of the battle against evil, the battle for the Kingdom. We all walk the way of the cross with the Lord as we
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suffer the results of evil in the world yet refuse to be swayed from our goal, our personal Calvaries, our determination to love God with our whole hearts, minds and lives.

There are just so many times that we feel we cannot go another step on the path the Lord has set us on. A person might be a single Catholic determined to live a Christian moral life, but immersed in a world where immorality is viewed as a norm for single life. How many men and women have let go of their Christian standards of life because they are just too tired to fight off what everyone else says should be normal behavior for a young or even older single? Or a person might be a husband or wife, Mom or Dad, involved in a continual battle to keep God in his or her home. "I give up, I can't go another step," that person might say when the children demand to do what other people let their kids do, or when sickness, unemployment or other problems seem to be insurmountable. How many times people have said to me, I just can't take anymore. I've felt that way too. We just have to remember that when Jesus carried that Cross, he fell three times. His body wanted to die on the road to Golgotha. But he refused to give up. He had to reach the rightful conclusion to his life. After all, it was his father's plan. The plan had to be fulfilled. When we feel that we can't go another step, when the weight of the world appears more than we can carry, or when we wonder if there is any purpose to our struggles, we have to remember the big picture, the big plan: our struggles are part of the battle for the Kingdom.

There is a second aspect of the three falls that we pray

over in the way of the cross. Jesus fell, got up to complete the plan. Sometimes we fall, not due to sickness or any other concern of the world, but we fall because we sin. There is something worse than falling into sin. What is worse is refusing
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to get up. We are all imperfect. We are all tempted at various times. We all sin. But we can't give up. We can't say, "Well, this is the way I am. I don't like the fact that I have a horrible temper, or that I have problems controlling myself in this or that area, but that's the way that I am; so I am not going to fight sin." We can't say, "I've tried getting up before. I'll probably just fall again, so why bother?" Why bother? We bother because it is the Lord that helps us up. We bother because the Lord has a plan for us. We can't stay down. He needs us to walk with him to the conclusion of our journey in life.

One of the most beautiful aspects of Lent, is that it is a long forty day lifestyle adjustment. We are determined during Lent to put up the fight for the Kingdom. We are determined during Lent to be part of that plan that Moses and Elijah discussed with Jesus on the mountain of the transfiguration. We pray today for the courage to join the Lord in the struggle for the Kingdom.