

Third Sunday of Lent: Belonging to the Spiritual

Today's readings help us to refocus on the spiritual in our lives, to refocus on the mystical. The mystery of God has entered human history in the covenant God made with this wandering Aramean, Abram, whom He now names Abraham. St. Paul tells the Philippians that they should not be like the Pharisees who are so concerned with Jewish dietary laws that "Their God is their belly," and so proud of their circumcision that "their glory is in a shameful part of their body." The problem was that they were not allowing mystery, the mystical, to enter their lives. "Our citizenship is in heaven," St. Paul says. The spiritual is what matters. We have to allow God to transform our minds by his spiritual reality. We cannot allow ourselves to be reduced to a mere external following of physical laws. The spiritual must reign. The spiritual must transform the world.

We come upon Jesus at prayer on the Mountain. Even though the Transfiguration is presented in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, *Matthew, Mark and Luke*, only *Luke* begins the account with the Lord at prayer. This is significant. The Lord is opening Himself to the presence of the Father. At peace, at prayer, He is transformed, transfigured, into a state that reflects the glory of God. Moses and Elijah appear. They also are radiant, reflecting the glory of God. Moses, the representative of the Books of the Law, Elijah, representing the Books of the Prophets, come to speak to Jesus, the very Word of God. They are speaking of God's plan for his people, the conquest of the spiritual. Of course, the disciples, Peter, James and John, don't understand this. They are still looking for a physical kingdom. The spiritual is beyond them. The voice in the cloud is meant for them and us: "This is my Beloved Son, Listen to Him."

We belong to the spiritual. We belong to God. We are made in the image and likeness of God. But the image of God, our capacity to be spiritual, is hidden deep within us. The Lord will reveal it, though, if we let Him.

There is a story about a Parisian who went for a walk to the outskirts of the city when he heard hammering and chipping coming from a large home. He was bold enough to walk across the large front yard and peer into the door. It was the studio of the famous sculpture, Auguste Rodin. You know Rodin as the sculptor of the piece we call *The Thinker*, maybe you know his work *The Burgers of Calais*; he had many, many wonderful works of art, my favorite is his *Hand of God*. Anyway, the man had the nerve to walk into the studio and interrupt Rodin at his work. "Excuse me," he said, "but how exactly do you do that?"

"Do what?" Rodin asked, somewhat perturbed.

"How do you create such beautiful works?" the man asked. "I'd love to be a sculptor myself."

Rodin was perturbed, his work was interrupted by this uninvited stranger. He

was about to explode in anger, but he calmed himself and just said to the man, "Well, let's say that you wanted to do a sculpture of an elephant."

"Yes," said the man, "how would I do that?"

"It is simple," Rodin said, "You just get a very large block of marble, you get a set of chisels and a few hammers, and then you chip off everything on the block that doesn't look like an elephant."

Rodin was being sarcastic. But the method of creating a masterpiece described in the story is not that far away from the work the Divine Sculptor does on us.

Each of us is created in the image and likeness of God. But that image is hidden in the hard rock that is our resistance to God. The Lord chips away on us. He hammers out our selfishness. How can we be followers of the one who sacrificed all for love and be selfish? The negative drives within us are also chipped away, our anger, our greed, our lust, our jealousy. When we commit to the Lord, the Divine Sculptor chips it all away. That is why He came. He came to remove all that which is not the image and likeness of God and reveal each of us as the masterpiece God intends us to be.

"May he make of us an eternal offering to you," we pray in the Third Eucharistic Prayer. Jesus transforms us into a gift to the Father. Allowing him to work on us, remove all that is not the image and likeness of God, is the work of our lives, work that intensifies during the season of Lent. In the second Lenten preface we pray, "As we recall the great events that gave us new life in Christ you bring the image of your Son to perfection within us."

There is an old expression, "God is not through with me yet." It is true. He is still chipping away at each of us. Sometimes we are impatient with ourselves. We want to be better, but we don't see it happening. We are fighting our anger, but still lose our temper. We are fighting against a sinful manner of living, but still feel the intensity of the temptation to fall back into the destructive patterns of life we had embraced. We have to be patient with ourselves. We need to realize that God is working on us, each of us. On the negative side, if we fall, He picks us up, and we learn the location of the stumbling stone. And we can avoid falling there again. And He chips away a part of us that is not His Image and Likeness. Or, on the positive side, people come into our lives who need special help, significant actions of love. Maybe it's the old man down the block whose wife died and has no one to look in on him. We make him a part of our lives, going over to his home frequently just to chat, perhaps getting his groceries, whatever, and the Lord chips away and a beautiful image of His Presence begins to emerge from the hard stone. Perhaps, a member of our family is going through a difficult time, physically, psychologically, emotionally. We bite our tongues, try to be as understanding as possible, and the Lord keeps chipping away on us.

We can all add many examples of ways both positive and negative that the Lord is transforming us. We belong to the Kingdom of God. We are made in His Image and Likeness. We are physical and spiritual. We have our citizenship in heaven. Jesus Christ is transforming us into an everlasting gift to the Father.

The Divine Sculptor's work will not be unveiled until our mission on earth is complete. What will we look like if we let Him complete His Work? Well, we also will be transfigured.