

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT Year C February 24, 2013

Theme: Overwhelmed by the Sacred

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The reader proclaimed the same first reading we heard today, granted in an older translation.

He came to the solemn part where Abraham cut the heifer, the ram and the she-goat in two pieces and laid them opposite each other and laid the turtle doves and pigeons there as well.

Then Abraham, in a trance and in a deep and terrifying darkness, waited for a sign of God's Presence to pass between the pieces and ratify the covenant.

But instead of reading **“there appeared a smoking brazier and a flaming torch”**, the poor reader said **“there appeared a smoking brassiere and a flaming torch.”**

After a moment for this faux pas to sink in, the young presiding priest doubled over in his seat and started shaking uncontrollably with laughter.

Many women and their husbands in the congregation were soon in tears of similar laughter.

Young people were giggling and older folks were shaking their heads and tisk-tisking.

As soon as things quieted down, someone in the assembly would again picture that smoking brassiere swooping down from heaven and bust out laughing causing the whole place to go up for grabs.

The young priest never did make it through his homily that week and the poor reader had to have someone explain to him why everyone was laughing.

Perhaps this is why the translation no longer reads “**smoking brazier**” but “**smoking fire pot.**”

Talk about ruining a moment of profound solemnity and sacred holiness.

But, then, Peter seemed to do exactly the same thing if without the humor.

Jesus was transfigured before their eyes, Peter’s, James’ and John’s: His face changed in appearance, his clothes made dazzling white.

The two most revered figures in Hebrew history – Moses and Elijah – are standing there with them.

And what did Peter say: “**Master,... let us make three tents....**”

Your friend is suddenly standing before you shimmering in heavenly magnificence and glory, Moses and Elijah are talking to him, and what you come up with is to build three tents!

Even if Peter meant a kind of ceremonial tent or shrine, get real, man, look what’s going on in front of your eyes!

How could you be so blind to the extraordinary revelation to which you and your two companions are alone privileged to see.

Notice how in the story Peter’s comment is literally cut off by the cloud which engulfs him and his companions and the divine command to “**listen to**” Jesus.

It is a story of a moment of profound solemnity and sacred holiness being compromised, diminished by human weakness and foolishness.

So what does it all have to do with us and especially with our Lenten journey toward the celebration of the paschal mystery at Easter?

Well, is there any solemnity more profound, any sacred event holier than the Paschal Mystery we are preparing to celebrate:

---the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's Son sent to demonstrate the extent of divine love and mercy for humanity?

---and as St. Paul described the full expanse of this mystery to the church community in Philippi in our reading today: **"he will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body."**

---in other words, the mystery we are preparing to celebrate is our own destiny of resurrection with Christ!

Now if ever there was a spectacularly profound solemnity and a blow-it-out-the roof holy event, then the Paschal Mystery is it!

No wonder we take forty days to get ready for it.

Surely then, we dare not stand before the Mystery of Easter and merely say: 'Oh goodie, Easter is coming; I better go buy some of those little yellow marshmallow peeps and the Cadbury maple nut Easter eggs.

Oh, and yes, better start looking for that new spring Easter outfit; need something fresh for church that day.

This would be like wanting to build three tents in the face of the awesome moment of Transfiguration or bringing a smoking you know what to the covenant ratification.

Lent, brothers and sisters, should ready us to receive the Easter message as fully and as deeply as possible.

Lent should make us eager to hear what the message of resurrection means not just for our future hereafter, but what it means for how we live here and now.

Lent is time, gradually, week by week, to psyche ourselves for an explosion of Good News lighting up the darkness of death in the most spectacularly profound, solemnly sacred and a blow-it-out-the roof holy event God has ever done.

Surely we wouldn't want to do something stupid, would we?