

## Second Sunday in Lent, year A:

### Five Reflective Insights Based on the Seven Points

**Readings:** Genesis 12:1-4a; Ps 121; Rom 4:1-17 (snippeted!); John 3:1-17

Recall: what we are aiming to do:

- start with our lives as they engage these classic readings; realign afresh;
- allow the blend of ancient narratives and contemporary cosmology to engage us;
- analogies: we see our parents differently over time, and our children; no need to stall
- process: we start with some of the 7 points (rather than with the text).

1. **time moving ahead:** Believe it or not! For the New Cosmology Christian believers, the hero of New Cosmology is ... Abraham, and Sarah, of course! Why so? Because they are constantly drawn or hustled forward by God, fresh adventures, no repeats. In biblical terms, we think they are the first of the Jewish ancestors, which in the whole storyline they are. But in more carefully-examined terms, they are an old couple, living in modern Iraq/ancient Babylon who were “nearing retirement” when they are called by God to refugee to a new place ... have many adventures along the way. They settle north of where God wants them, and so calls them forth again ... they try for a baby ... and so forth. In slightly more technical terms, the OT storytellers seem to construct these first forebears from Babylon, where they survived the worst thing (we know of) that happened in the whole Old Testament period: the defeat of Israel by the Babylonians. So as the big adventure picks up again, the pioneers are Abraham and Sarah. Did they want whole fresh adventures at their ages??? Do they go nonetheless! They do! The piece from Romans makes a similar point: Abraham (and Sarah) are not earning points with God but growing a relationship ... over the span of their lives. They are waving to us!

2. **God's main job:** We can note one angle on this from the responsory psalm. The Sunday lectionary uses a few psalms for this job and then usually takes just a few verses (snippets them!). Today, the whole thing. The psalmist needs something: we can fill in what the need might be, perhaps starting big and basic: a relationship with the deity that will be helpful? As we read the rest of the psalm, we can see that it is protection and support that are asked for here, and asked of God in his night watchman role. So when the psalmist/ourselves are sleeping and not able to keep watch, we want God on patrol to keep us safe. The psalmist/ourselves is confident of the qualifications of the watchman—maker of all that is, so God as creator, able to keep sun and moon from harming us. The watchman is highly experienced, is always on duty (no sleep or slumber, night and day shifts)--but tired? No! The challenge here, perhaps, is to face squarely

the question we likely have: Is God a reliable saver-of-us from everything that might happen? No, that clearly does not happen. So if we are not saved from *everything*, what's on offer here? We as *creatures* (the world implies that we accept our status as *created by God*) know that "rescue" is not always on tap. So what is? What do we most want from God? My answer would be relatedness, relationship. I think that's on offer, but it's not easy, needs constant tending. The psalm says God is always "on." So are we—on? How do we get better at "on"? Oh—there are Abraham and Sarah beckoning to us again!

3. **God's main job:** Here is another way to talk about what God *does*, who God *is*. But I am approaching it from the underside, that is, from what humans seem to have *thought* about this over time. If the word "religion" is the basic umbrella term for how our species tries to grow the relationship between us and God, we can know (if we investigate) that humans over time have done many things for our part of the relationship: so the cave paintings, experiences in nature, rituals that include animals and plants ... many things we don't understand very well but can glimpse. One way to say this is how do we establish and maintain contact with God? Many moderns don't worry about this at all, which strikes me as a diminishment. Not because we will be punished, but because we will miss out. But since God is ultimately largely mysterious to humans (despite our efforts to tame God), we try *something*, various things. For the Jewish people it was the Torah, which gets a bad rap in the New Testament. Paul's point here, if I can sharpen it, is that we need to do what we think helps us relate with God, and we need to do (generally speaking) what our kin-group does. But two things: We do well not to literalize ("monetize") these actions, as though we are owed by God for doing them; and as ritual slips out of meaningfulness, experts should adjust it. Ritual should generally fit. And we can assume that our doing these things aligns us for God. Analogy, since this is challenging but important: Suppose we have care of an old relative, and at some point, she includes us in her will. We didn't *earn* and are not *entitled* to her money, but our getting it is related to our *faithful doing* of the task.

4. **Beyond Videos:** What is Jesus trying to help Nicodemus get, and how is he missing it, despite wanting to get it? If we imagine ourselves sitting around a table with Jesus and Nicodemus, as they talk, we can try to help by figuring out what each of them wants. (We also note that John the Evangelist is shaping this discussion to the aims of the Gospel as well, and we want to appreciate that too!). Nicodemus, arguably, wants to fit all that Jesus is saying into what is already pretty clear to him; it doesn't fit, and he is frustrated and finally wants simply to re-watch the video in hopes something new will sink in. Jesus wants him to shift gears—or wants us to see that *without a shift of gears*, we will miss his challenge. We can't read familiar texts in the same old way and expect that they will not grow stale. "Born again" is not literally possible but as a symbol it can work: many new ways to hear fresh and radical invitations, even for us,

hanging out and in with Jesus for many years! How do you recall and related your most powerful “born again” experience? This is related to one of our last Thursday night discussions about how, actually, Scripture/revelation/inspiration work! Sarah and Abraham wave again!

**5. the cosmic Christ:** So what is Jesus challenging Nicodemus and us to here? First, it’s clear that no one in the Gospels gets what’s on offer until Jesus appears to them after his resurrection. Partly, yes, but fully: not possible. The easy way, the temptation for us, is to say “just a great man!” He was/is, but there is more. Our challenge is to see the same person but now working in a new mode and to try to grasp what else he is calling us to, including but going beyond being a good person. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry are two thinkers who have written about this Christic role, which leads us into quite fresh but highly exciting territory. [I will provide some bibliography by the end of Lent.)

If I were to *develop a homily* on these ... it would be about the challenge of moving ahead constantly rather than settling in to what is familiar, easy, somewhat comfortable. Yes, we are slowing down in lots of ways, but to continue growing as wise and committed, loving friends of Jesus, God and Holy Spirit (and all their friends) is possible, even urgent. Try it, we will like it! Oh there are Sarah and Abraham again, beckoning to us! What’s that she’s carrying?