

Commentary to the 2nd Sunday of Lent -C-



The Divine Sculpture

“How am I to know that I shall possess the lands you tell me you are giving me?” Abram asked God. Abram received the covenant with God in a mystical way. He was told to make a very large sacrifice, but not in the normal manner. He was to sacrifice a heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtledove and a pigeon, but instead of burning them, he had to cut them in half, except for the birds. Then we have this scene of Abraham spending the day keeping the vultures away from the carcasses, no small job. Evening came and Abram fell into a trance. God provided the fire for the immolation of the sacrifice. A smoking pot and a flaming torch passed through them. The covenant was sealed with the action of the spiritual.

Jesus, Peter, John and James, go up a mountain to pray. Then the spiritual meets the physical. Jesus’ face changes, his clothes become dazzling white, and Moses and Elijah appear. They speak about the Exodus, but not the deliverance of the Hebrew people from Egypt that Moses led fifteen hundred years earlier, but the Exodus that would begin in Jerusalem, the deliverance of the people from the grasp of evil.

And Paul tells the Philippians not to be tied to the world. They are much more than that, much better than that. Jewish dietary laws and the rite of circumcision have become more important for those who are tied to the world than the reasons behind these actions. As a result they are only concerned with following the dietary laws. Their god is their belly. They boast about the rite of circumcision. Their glory is their shame. “You though,” Paul says, “Are so much better than that. You don’t belong to this world. You belong to the spiritual world. Our citizenship is in heaven. Our Savior will come from there to restore the world to God’s original plan.

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.

Fr. Joseph Pellegrino