

Homily for the Second Sunday of Lent (A)

St. Joseph's Neier

March 15-16, 2014

Rev. Kevin Schmittgens

Central Idea: Lent calls us out of our comfort zones of sin, to find new life in the Promised Land of God's grace.

There always has to be a first step, a first step out of your comfort zone.

The first time a child goes off to school.

The first time they ride a bike without training wheels.

The first time they drive a car.

The first time they leave home for college.

The first time you fly in a plane.

The first time you teach a class.

The first time you walk down an aisle in church with a new spouse.

The first time you have a child.

For me, the first time I presided at Mass.

Last Sunday (and this Sunday for a few who were away), I celebrated our second graders first Reconciliation. (That's first Confession for you older kids.) Luckily, the children know me, and I think, they somewhat like me and are not terrified of me. But it is still a rather daunting experience. Going into a room, telling someone your sins, trying to remember the Act of Contrition, worried about what Father might say or do. It is a large first step out of their comfort zones. The first time can be intimidating and scary.

And yet, is there any other way to grow, is there any other way to thrive, is there any other way to live?

In our first reading, the forefather of the three great religions, Abram, is called out of his comfort zone, his home of Ur of the Chaldees and into a new land. There is something amazing about the reading: it just comes out of nowhere. There is no real back story to Abram. There is no set up. There is no exposition. There is no "there" there. There is no reason why Abram is the one, chosen by The Lord God. There is little clue, little understanding of who this "Lord God" even is. It just simply begins. *Abram! Yeah! Leave your home town of Ur. Leave Ur? Yep. Now? Yep. You sure? Move it! OK.*

The utter simplicity of our first reading is totally and absolutely disconcerting. If Abram was your son and he just woke up one day, packing up his stuff and moving to a foreign land because God told him to, you would have his head examined. If it were me, I would be asking a ton of questions. Do you have a map to this so called Promised Land? Who lives there and how exactly do they feel about immigrants? Is there possibility of

employment? What about food? I am sorta addicted to food, you know. And really, who exactly are you “Lord God”?

We uphold Abram as a model of faith, but we could just as easily think of his as a bit off for what he is doing.

And yet, Abram’s journey is our journey this Lent. Abram’s call is our call. Each and everyone one of us is being asked during this season, to get up, get moving and get out of our comfort zones, get out of the “UR’s” of our lives, and trust that we go to a new place, a new home, a Promised Land of reconciliation and joy.

There are two questions that we must answer.

First, what are we leaving? Ur will look different for each person. Maybe you are stuck in the comfort zone of anger and bitterness. Maybe you are stuck in the comfort zone of mediocrity and boredom. Maybe you are stuck in the comfort zone of selfishness and greed. Maybe you are stuck in the comfort zone of sadness and grief. Even the most horrid of places in which we find ourselves, can become snug and cozy, as odd as that may be. Prisons can be very comfy. And yet, we know that we can be ensnared in our comfort zones, and we know that we will never grow, never thrive, never become the people that God wants us to become.

Second, how do we get there? Once again, this will be different for different people. I like the path our second graders took, the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Talk about getting out of your comfort zone! When we look at our lives honestly and openly, when we physically can tell another human being where we have gone off the track, what our “Ur” looks like; when we face the naked truth, we cannot help but grow, we cannot help but thrive, we cannot help but find the path to a new and vibrant land.

When Abram set off, he did not have it all together, he did not know for sure where the journey would lead. Nevertheless, he trusted the Lord God and that trust, that faith made all of the difference in the world. It helped create the world that followed him. Abram himself would be transformed by the journey. He would receive a new name Abraham indicative of how this sojourn to a new land would make him new.

And it all started so simply, so plainly, so straightforwardly.

It began with a step.

A first step.