

**2 Lent – Year C – March 3, 2010 - Homily**  
**Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-35**  
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Even though I used to be quite the horror movie aficionado, I began to realize how numbing it is to watch violence on TV or in the movies. Scenes of violence first anaesthetize and then begin to destroy our compassionate sensibilities towards others. It's been years since I actually saw a flesh-eating zombie movie, so it was a surprise to see the psalmist describe his enemies in such graphic detail. The evils of physical violence, both real and imagined, are just one example. There are plenty of other evils in the world that can eat up our flesh. The psalmist describes his own adversaries as evildoers and foes. When you and I imagine our foes, we might think of the threat of terrorism. Much closer to home, our enemies may feel more like migrant workers, or anyone else who is different from us. Even closer still, there are the adversaries we find in dealing with physical or mental illness, or addictions. Then there are the internal struggles we have with feelings of jealousy or resentment, anger or fear. Especially in this Lenten season, it may be important for us to remember that not all our antagonists are external, and many are beyond our control.

Each of these is part of the human condition. What the psalmist does for us is set out two very different scenarios in a life of faith. As limited, finite creatures of a mysterious yet ever-loving God, we too will experience both of these situations, probably multiple times in our faith journeys. In the first half of Psalm 27, we have the overall impression of confident faith in the Lord, and God's presence. Verse 1 says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?" The psalmist goes on to tell us how he saw the Lord's saving hand in action when he was beset by enemies. Just like this writer, many of us have experienced times and incidents when we have known the very close presence of God in our lives, seen and felt God's providential care. God's gift of faith has given us eyes to see and ears to hear God's love in clear and tangible ways. Blaise Pascal offers an interesting insight into the realities of our lives. He says, "What can be seen on earth points to neither the total absence nor the obvious presence of divinity, but to the presence of a hidden God. Everything bears this mark." There are most certainly days and times when we can feel very close to God, and then quite suddenly find ourselves wondering if we have been abandoned by the Lord.

The Scriptures also point to the mystery of faith, and the key to our Psalm this evening. As the Epistle to the Hebrews (11:1) says, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." We talk a lot about our hope for eternal life, which is the gift of our salvation in Christ Jesus, our Lord. But hope is also embedded in our faith, to strengthen us when we have turned away from God, like the times when we feel God has forsaken us. Hope is the voice of the Holy Spirit gently whispering in our hearts, "Seek my face". And hope is our heart's reply, "Your face, Lord will I seek." Our hope in Christ is also part of embodying our faith in daily life. With God's help, we create opportunities to express and display more of God's goodness and love in what the psalmist calls "the land of the living". In other words, our hope and trust in the unseen God, energizes and empowers us to be the face of Christ to others, the hands and feet of the Lord in our community, and a visible reminder to believers and non-believers that God is here. As a dynamic part of our faith in action, our hope in Christ has the power to defeat the many evils we face. Emily Dickinson's poem called "*Hope*" is the thing with feathers, describes this hidden quality of our faithful lives beautifully. "'Hope' is the thing with feathers - / That perches in the soul - / And sings the tune without the words - / And never stops - at all - / And sweetest - in the Gale - is

heard - / And sore must be the storm - / That could abash the little Bird / That kept so many warm - / I've heard it in the chilliest land - / And on the strangest Sea - / Yet, never, in Extremity, / It asked a crumb - of Me.” Hope too, then, is a pure and grace-filled gift of God.

Beyond the hope of refuge in the Lord, and protection from enemies, a life of faithful service to the Lord has given our psalmist another gift. That is a life of freedom from fear. As it says in the Book of Proverbs (29:25), “The fear of others lays a snare, but one who trusts in the Lord is secure.” We live in anxious times, as it was also for the writer of Psalm 27. As one commentator puts it, “In a world teeming with broken relationships, personal disappointments, public scandals, political games, cultural disrespect, and increased terrorist threats, trust is difficult to extend – even to God.” There is still a lot of uncertainty in the world. The psalmist wisely found great comfort in seeking one thing of the Lord, “that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life”. When Jesus visits with Martha and Mary, we hear Martha complain bitterly about Mary not helping her, and Jesus replies, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing” (Luke 10:41-42). Perhaps the deep faith, trust and hope of the psalmist who speaks so confidently of God as his light, salvation, and strength, can be found in our own lives when we too seek one thing.

There is also something about hope that encourages us to be honest with God. The Psalms are filled with the whole spectrum of human emotions, unabridged. They seem at times brutally honest in their prayers to God, holding together faith and doubt, quite often with the thread called hope. The Psalms offer us a great example of how we too can pray to the Lord, and Lent is an excellent time to develop our prayer lives. Offering to God in prayer all our experiences and frustrations, as well as our thanksgivings and joys, is another way of coming before God with our whole self. Seeking the face of God in times of joy and sorrow, and at all times is one thing we can do that helps us to be more aware of God’s presence.

As we each continue our inward and outward journeys of self-examination, repentance, and studying God’s word, like the Psalmist, we can be confident of our hope in the Lord, even in times when our prayers do not seem to be answered right away. Lent is a season of waiting and preparation. As the psalmist notes in the last line “wait patiently for the Lord.” It takes a lot of faith to wait for the Lord, when we feel the pressure and the pain of our present needs. Patiently seeking the Lord, searching for God in all the facets of life, and developing our spiritual practices are an important part of this season. Lent blesses us with the time to hone the spiritual skills that make our hope and faith in the Lord meaningful. May the Lord continue to bless our inward and outward journeys as we too seek a deeper intimacy with God, and wait patiently for the Lord’s response. Luther’s Lenten hymn #151 in *The Hymnal 1982*, sums it all up in the words of the third verse: “And thus my hope is in the Lord, and not in my own merit; I rest upon his faithful word to them of contrite spirit. That he is merciful and just, here is my comfort and my trust; his help I wait with patience.”

Amen.