

## 2nd Sunday in Lent

02/25/18

When I was in high school, I was given the opportunity to pursue my German language studies by taking a 6-week course in Austria. Needless to say, I wanted very much to take advantage of this chance and so with a little help from my folks and a lot of extra hours selling ice cream and delivering papers, I was able to make the trip.

I was immediately awestruck by the breathtaking scenery of our tiny village nestled 4000 feet above Innsbruck. One of my favorite pastimes was to ride the chair lift and cable car up to the top of a nearby mountain and just take in the view. I would take a box lunch with and perhaps some postcards or other writing material. However it was hard to concentrate on writing while in the presence of so much beauty. I truly felt I was seeing the hand of God at work.

It would have been wonderful to spend the rest of my life on that mountaintop, but I knew that was not possible. It would have been wonderful to remain in that state of peace and serenity, but I knew that was not possible. I knew there was a reality waiting for me that was not always as cozy and serene and beautiful as the top of my mountain.

Life is like that. Life is filled with mountaintops that are comforting and peaceful. We have a great job, a great family, and we're in good shape spiritually, physically, mentally and emotionally. Life on our mountain is going along okay; God has treated us pretty well. Then something happens in our lives to topple us from the mountaintop. We lose our job, we lose a loved one, we experience a crisis of some kind. And suddenly we are forced to come down from the mountain, perhaps even to the depths of a valley.

The same was true of Peter, James and John. They were invited to join Jesus on a journey to the top of a high mountain. And as soon as He was transfigured before them, they didn't want it to end. Peter suggested that three booths be set up. "Lord, it is good for us to be here," he said. In effect Peter said, "Let's bask in the glow of this marvelous event." But much like my experience in Austria, they couldn't stay on the mountain forever.

Abraham has a mountaintop experience today, too. But his is anything but comforting and peaceful. He is asked by God to sacrifice his only son, the product of his old age, the one who God has said would be the

beginning of a legacy of descendants more numerous than the stars in the sky or the sands on the seashore.

What happened? What kind of God would do this?

As I thought about the recent events at the high school in Florida, I was asking myself the same question? What sort of God am I worshipping? What sort of God have I given my life to? How can this all-loving, all-powerful God allow this unspeakable crime to take place? Am I still called to obey and love this God who at times seems uncaring and unloving, this God of Abraham and Isaac and Jesus? Dominican Laurie Brink has some ideas.

When asking ourselves how far we should go to love God, she wonders about going as far as Abraham offering his only son. She wonders about going as far as God Himself went in having His Son become one of us, one with us, allowing Him to die for us.

Ms. Brink lives with diabetes and only the discipline of counting carbs and exercise keep her healthy. She speaks of people in recovery living one day at a time. They have died to the substances they abused and now live a transformed life of attending meetings and living honestly.

Frederich Buechner looks at it this way in one of the entries in his daily meditation book, *Listening to Your Life*. This particular entry is about God making Himself scarce and he uses the weeping of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus as his example.

Buechner suggests that Jesus weeps at the visible absence of God in a world where the good and bad go down to defeat and death. He sheds His tears at those moments when a word from God might mean the difference between life and death, where the deafness of people prevents their hearing Him or the blindness of people prevents our seeing Him in each other.

If you think I have the answer as to why events like the shooting in Florida happen, you're sorely mistaken. Many, many solutions have been put forth and some of them are good, some not so good. Of one thing I'm certain: God was weeping right along with the rest of us as we watched more and more of the videos. Because, no matter what we do to ourselves, He can't stop loving us; after all, He loved us into existence, we with all our faults and failings. And He will continue to be with us and love us through every valley we encounter. Because that's the kind of God He is.