

“Keeping Our Vision Focused on the Ultimate Goal”
Homily for the Installation of Fr. Youngsaeng Goo as Pastor of St. Michael Parish
2nd Sunday of Lent, Year “B”

Introduction

It is certainly a delight for me to be here on this happy occasion, to welcome Fr. Goo as your new pastor. I am grateful to Bishop Matthias Ri Iong-hoon of Suwon for supporting Korean Catholics here in San Francisco by continuing to send his priests to serve here, and also his seminarians to be educated at our seminary, St. Patrick’s Seminary in Menlo Park. So I am also happy to have join us today Deacons John and Paul from Suwon, in their final year of theology studies at St. Patrick’s.

This exchange of clergy, resources and good will between Suwon and San Francisco is a great blessing to both, and contributes to tightening the bonds of communion we enjoy between our two local churches. For this, I am most grateful to God.

Beginning and End

The arrival of a new pastor marks a beginning in the life of a parish; our readings for this Second Sunday of Lent are also marked with this theme of beginning.

The Gospel for this Sunday is always the story of our Lord’s Transfiguration, the glimpse into the future glory of his Resurrection that was allowed to the apostles Peter, James and John. In all of the accounts of the Transfiguration, there is mention of the voice from the cloud: “This is my beloved Son.”

This may sound familiar, as we heard it last month on the last day of the Christmas season, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. There when the Lord emerges from being baptized a voice comes from heaven with the same declaration, “This is my beloved Son.” This happens at the very beginning of our Lord’s public ministry.

The voice of the Father proclaiming His beloved Son marks the beginning of the Galilean ministry at Jesus’ baptism, while here it marks the beginning of his journey to Jerusalem, where he will go to die for us on the Cross. Both are at a beginning point, and both point to the end of the Gospel, when the Roman centurion, after Jesus dies on the Cross, will look upon him and exclaim, “Truly this man was the Son of God.” He was a Roman, that is, a gentile, not of the Jewish – that is to say, Chosen – people. Here we find, then, an implied prophecy of the Church’s mission to the gentile peoples, that the Church will bring all nations over the face of the earth into the family of God, so that all nations might come to share in Christ’s salvation.

This is also the reason why the Church gives us this Gospel reading so early on in the season of Lent, that is, to keep our focus on the destination of Lent: in the midst of the penances and other acts of self-renunciation to which we subject ourselves during Lent, the Church wants us to keep our attention focused on the ultimate purpose of it all. It is a sort of lesson for all of life: live always in a way that will move you toward our ultimate goal as Christians, the life of heaven. But what is the key to doing this?

Following the Voice

The answer is found in the completion of what that voice proclaimed from the cloud: “This is my beloved Son. *Listen to him.*” And for this, we have the example of Abraham.

Along with the Gospel reading about the Transfiguration, the Church also gives us the story of God putting Abraham to the test. God tests Abraham’s faith, to secure Abraham’s

fidelity to Him and Abraham’s obedience to His commandments no matter what the price. We might wonder, though, why God would ask such a thing of Abraham. Of course, from our perspective, knowing how the story ends, we can understand that God never intended to do this from the start. And also, the very fact that Abraham would carry out such an order indicates that he was absolutely certain that this was God’s voice. But there is more to the story here.

Notice what St. Paul says in the second reading for our Mass today, from his Letter to the Romans: “God ... did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all.” Didn’t we just hear that in the reading before: “because you acted as you did in not withholding from me your beloved son I will bless you abundantly”? So we can see this additional meaning here: the story of Abraham’s obedience to God in asking him to sacrifice his own son anticipates what God will do for us: sacrifice – that is, not spare – His own Son for the sake of our eternal life with Him. And the fact that God provides a ram in place of Abraham’s son show that God’s Son will be the true Lamb of sacrifice – the lamb being the animal of sacrifice in the Jewish Passover ritual.

Abraham, too, represents a beginning: he was the first to know and believe in the one, true God. “Believe in” means not simply a theoretical affirmation of certain doctrines, but to follow in God’s way, to do His will, to listen to that voice and obey *no matter what the cost*. This is the beginning of God working out His plan of salvation for us, and we see that, once again, it begins with keeping the ultimate goal before us: the salvation Christ would win for us in his sacrifice of the Cross.

As Korean Catholics, you can be rightly proud of your predecessors in the faith in your home country, who gave good example as Abraham of listening to and obeying that voice no matter the cost. Subject to the most horrendous persecution, these are Catholics who were willing to, *and did*, sacrifice everything to stay true to their Lord who sacrificed everything for them. As Pope St. John Paul II stated in his homily at the Mass of Canonization of the Korean Martyrs in 1984 during his Apostolic Visit there: “The death of these martyrs became the leaven of the Church and led to today’s splendid flowering of the Church in Korea.”

Where we live here and now is certainly different for Catholics than in Korea 200 years ago. Nonetheless, we are still subject to similar temptations to ignore that voice that commands us to “listen to him,” but now in much more subtle ways. The Catholic faith in Korea began with faithful disciples who kept their vision fixed on the eternal life with God that His Son has prepared for us, and nothing could sway them from that. I thank God for the flowering of the Church in Korea, and for the spiritual leaven that Korean Catholics provide for us here in the Archdiocese of San Francisco.

At a time and place where the beauty of the Christian message is rejected, where family life has disintegrated and become practically unrecognizable, where the first and only priority in so many people’s lives is “me, myself and I,” the Korean Catholic community here provides a powerful countersign: renouncing selfishness for strengthening the bonds of community, the community of the family of faith which is first of all the parish, and the community of the natural family of father, mother and children. This is how the Church and society flourish. I am very grateful to the Korean community here for this witness to the power and beauty of following the voice of God in our land.

Conclusion

Fr. Goo’s assuming the office of pastor here at St. Michael’s parish assures the continuing of the flowering of the Korean Catholic community here in San Francisco. As a sign of the pastoral care he pledges to give you, we will now proceed to the rite of installation, where

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Fr. Goo will be presented and greeted by the leadership of the parish: staff, members of the pastoral council, and members of the finance council. He will then recite his oath of fidelity, beginning with the Nicene Creed that he will lead us all in reciting, and then continuing with the remainder of the oath.