Second Sunday of Lent: 3/12/23—5:00 PM, 7:30 and 9:30 AM

I remember way back in 1956, when I was a very young lad, seeing the blockbuster movie **The Ten Commandments** which starred Charlton Heston as Moses and Yul Brenner as Pharaoh. I understand that it cost $13 million to make in 1956 dollars but wound up making $122.7 in 1956 dollars, or $1.15 billion in 2023 dollars. Though nominated for 7 Academy Awards in 1957, it won only one, the Academy Award for Best Visual Effects, the effects were spectacular especially in pre-computer age. Please try to watch it this Lent.

One of my favorite scenes in that movie is when the Lord calls to Moses from the burning bush with a deep and resonant voice, **“Moses, Moses!”** telling Moses to take off his shoes. You will find that encounter between God and Moses in Chapter 3 of the Book of Exodus. In the year 1856, the British poetess Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote a very long poem titled **Aurora Leigh** which probably none of us have read, but there is one line from that poem that most of us have heard; it’s this line: ***“Earth's crammed with heaven, and*** **e*very common bush afire with God,******But only he who sees takes off his shoes;******The rest sit round & pluck blackberries.****”* Some years ago, I wanted to make sure that I had that Elizabeth Barrett Browning quote correct so I “googled” it and came across a reflection on her words by a writer by the name of Jay Ehret. His reflection reads this way:

***When I was a kid I would see these ads in comic books and magazines for mail-order X-ray glasses….All the stuff that was hidden would be in plain view because you had the magic glasses. I never ordered a pair of those glasses because it seemed just too good to be true. And it was. So, now as an adult, I consider my faith life and sometimes find myself searching for spiritual x-ray glasses. What if there were some special lens that would let us see God in everything. Is every common bush really afire? I think it is, but maybe we cannot see, not because we don’t have a lens, but because we are always wearing the wrong lens. We wear the lens of the world, one that judges beauty in a different way. We’ve lost our taste for everyday miracles, and we look to artificial beauty in place of the simple, wonderful creations of God. Could you marvel at an ordinary bush? A blade of grass? Why not? God created each individually. He designed this wonderful world and then breathed life into every living creature that inhabits it. Do we really need the flashy, unexplainable miracles to be able to see heaven in our midst? Or can we take off our worldly pair of X-ray glasses that don’t really work, and marvel at heaven crammed in every space around us?***

What we hear today in this Gospel passage of the Transfiguration of Jesus is a version of Exodus chapter 3. Peter, James, and John experience God the Father’s burning bush who is Jesus, the ***“beloved Son with whom I am well pleased,***” and the Father then encourages them to listen to him. With their eyes opened, they were very much afraid and fall to the ground in worship. Then Jesus raises them up and begins to instruct them about his death on the cross and his being raised from the dead.

Jesus is the Father’s burning bush for us too. We have an advantage over Peter, James, and John because all they knew was that Jesus was their friend, their leader, their teacher, but they didn’t know him yet as their God. However, we do know of Jesus to be God, coequal with that same God who spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai from the burning bush. Though we know of Jesus as being more than our friend, our leader, and our teacher, though we also know him as the God-man risen from the dead, how easy it is for us, as Elizabeth Barrett Browning says, to “sit around and pluck blackberries,” living with a ho-hum attitude toward Jesus.

If we allow our eyes to be opened as were the eyes of Peter, James, and John, then we will begin to see Jesus in a completely different light, seeing him to be God, coequal with that same God who spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai from the burning bush. We will begin to see him as the One who is Love itself. We will begin to see him as, not just as a far-off uncaring God but as our Brother who, in love, gave his life for us and who continues to be with us at every moment of everyday. And, if we are open to seeing Jesus as he truly is, won’t we begin to see the world God has made in a totally different way as Jay Ehret criticizes and then encourages as he writes: ***We’ve lost our taste for everyday miracles and we look to artificial beauty in place of the simple, wonderful creations of God. Could you marvel at an ordinary bush? A blade of grass? Why not? God created each individually. He designed this wonderful world and then breathed life into every living creature that inhabits it. Do we really need the flashy, unexplainable miracles to be able to see heaven in our midst? Or can we take off our worldly pair of X-ray glasses that don’t really work, and marvel at heaven crammed in every space around us?***