

February 25, 2018 – 2nd Sunday of Lent

This coming Wednesday the 28th of February, will be one of the days that I have confessions from 10:00 until noon, or as needed, during the day for Lent. If you would like to come at that time, it would be greatly appreciated. But, if you don't, I'm bringing a book.

A priest had made a sick call and he was out, walking back to the rectory and he decided to take a shortcut down this one street. It was a rough neighborhood, he decided, "I'm going to do it anyway." He pulled his trench coat together against the wind because it was blowing against him, and started walking down the street. All of a sudden a man jumped out of the alley with a gun and said, "I want your wallet." Father opened up his trench coat to reach for his wallet, and the thief saw his Roman collar. He says, "Oh no Father, I can't rob from you, go on your way." Father was so relieved, he reached in his coat, he says, "I've got a nice cigar here, do you want it?" The man says, "Oh no Father, I gave up smoking for Lent."

Father Andrew Greely, God rest his soul, at one point in his priesthood (he was a Jesuit so they do things like this), he took a poll around America. He was asking people, "Have you ever had a mystical experience?" "Have you ever had an experience where you felt that the supernatural, came into your life?" The vast majority of people said yes they had. So he concluded that we as Americans, we as a nation, are mystical people. Not just Saint Theresa of Avila, or Saint John of the Cross, or those people, but that we all, the vast majority, have mystical experiences. That's what our gospel is about, a mystical experience.

Mystical experiences; the supernatural intrudes, comes into the natural world. We see certain symbols in today's story, that relate to mystical experiences. First off; it happens on a mountain. Many of the important things in scripture, happen on mountains. Our first reading shows Abraham goes to Mount Moriah. It says the land of Moriah, but in those days, a lot of times, the land was named after the mountain. Why? Because you could see the mountain. So, they went to Mount Moriah to try and sacrifice his son, according to the will of God at the time. Now, as an aside, Moriah is where Jerusalem is today. Many of the places in the scripture, New Testament – Old Testament, where things took place; Salem became Jerusalem because God had that one spot picked out. The names change, but the place remained the same. Why mountains? Because we, as human beings, from the beginning, have had this internal feeling and belief that if we want to be close to God, to the Divine, we have to go up. God is up there. He's not to the left, He's not below, He's up. Also, mountains give us sight. Mountains give us a view of everything, that we didn't have before. When you go up a mountain, in mystical theology, you are seeing something you haven't seen before. You are feeling something you haven't felt before. So, mountains play a key part in mystical theology. Another one is transfigured, Jesus was transfigured, metamorphose in Greek. We here that term metamorphosis in biology; caterpillars changing into butterflies or moths. It means, gone beyond its current form. If something transfigures, it goes beyond its current form. Jesus transfigured; He went beyond His humanity and showed forth His divinity. The supernatural came into the natural. And so we see that transfigure doesn't just apply to Jesus, in the scriptures. It applies to anyone who has an experience. His clothes were white, beyond belief. Light, is another symbol. We say the fullers' lye, that's a person who bleaches clothes and did the laundry, back in the day. But, the Greek says, "whiter than snow." Snow was the whitest thing they had ever seen.

They didn't have industrial and car pollution, and all that to make it come down in other colors, it was as white as they'd ever seen. And it was beyond white. So, you have this light, and that's the same thing with mystical experience, it's a light. How many people have near death experiences and they say, "it was so bright, so much light?" Light gives us true vision. In a mystical experience, we see the truth. Anyone who has had glaucoma and then had surgery, a lot of them tell me, "Father, I can see like Superman." After the glaucoma is gone, after the cataracts are gone, "I can see like Superman." Light gives the ability to see. I know that when I'm sitting back there at adoration, in the back of the church on Saturday, and those lights are off, I can't read my spiritual book. If the lights were on, I can read. It gives us clarity that has not been there before. Peter gets dinged on this a lot. Let us build three tents, three booths, the other term is three tabernacles, for this experience. For the first century Jew and before, a tent was not just a place to live. A tent was a symbol for the mystical. It's where God dwelt, during the exodus in the desert, when they were leaving Egypt. It's where God dwelt for forty years, and longer, until King Solomon built a Temple. It means more than just a tent. More than just, "we're going to camp out on this mountain and wait for it to happen again." Because, part of mystical is, it's here and then it's not. Angels come and make announcements. Angels come and do things, they're here and then they're gone. Angels are mystical experiences. So tabernacles, wherever there's a mystical experience, we're tempted to do something. We're tempted to make a kind of memorial. We're kind of wanting something there to remind us that it happened. So, in a mystical place, a mystical experience, a lot of times we try to make it a place of worship; Fatima, Lourdes, Guadalupe, St. Michael the Archangel! Tabernacles everywhere! Because of mystical experiences. Peter wasn't saying, "Let's camp out here and wait for another one." He was saying, "Let's put up something so people can come and worship the spot where God came into the world." In the Old Testament, it's what you see. Wherever they encountered the mystical or they encountered God, they build a place to remember that by. That's what Peter was doing. The other thing about a mystical experience is, it's not just us and some force, us and some natural thing. It is us and a person. The mystical experience is with a person; Jesus, God, Blessed Mother, angels and saints. It is with a person; it is not just some disembodied force. When the disciples hear this voice, they know that God is present. They know that God is with them. Mystical experiences happen all the time. Mystical experiences are everywhere. Some people say, "Ah, that's just a coincidence." Leroy Jethro Gibbs and I do not believe in coincidences. (He is in NCIS, by the way, if you don't watch that show.) We don't believe in coincidences. We believe that God makes His presence felt, all the time. That's why Father Andrew Greely said, "We are a nation of mystics." We have experienced God enter the world into our lives. We don't talk about it because we don't want to be labeled something, like the people who believe in UFO's, that get labeled things all the time. We all have mystical experiences. We all have times when the supernatural came into our lives. One time, I had an experience with the supernatural, I've had many, but I'll tell you about this one. I used to work 3:30 to midnight shift in a manufacturing plant in Texas. I was used to getting on side roads and then getting on the freeway, building up speed so I entered the freeway at 65 MPH. Well, at 12:30 at night, there's nobody in your way, you can get as fast as you want. One time I went to work during the day for a meeting, and I forgot it wasn't night, in fact it was rush hour traffic. So I got my truck up to 65 MPH and I looked over there, and there was no room... and I was already committed. I was going to cause a multivehicle crash. But, all of a sudden, the steering wheel was wrenched out of my hands and my truck was shoved into traffic, with just inches between the front bumpers and the back bumpers. And I went, "Wow" and then I went, "Thank You." God did not want me to die on I 35 in the middle of Austin, Texas that day. He had more important things for me to do. Tadam... (applause) So, we are a mystical people. And if you ask people about it in the right way,

they will tell you, God entered their lives. Lent is a time we prepare, not only just for the sacraments, every time we receive a sacrament, every time we come to Mass, we see the Blessed Sacrament, we're encountering the supernatural, a mystical experience. We are going to experience a mystical experience at Easter, when God did something He has never done again or before, resurrection from the dead. Lent wants us to prepare. Not just for that mystical experience, but for all the mystical experiences we are going to have in our lives, before we die. We meditate, we sit down and we think. Sometimes we should keep a journal, "What has God done in my life that's truly amazing? Then we should prepare ourselves in praise and thanksgiving, that we have a God that didn't just create the universe, and go to sleep. We have a God that's truly involved in our lives, every day.

God bless you.