

Second Sunday of Lent
February 25, 2024
Year of the Most Holy Eucharist
Reflection #9

“He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, ‘I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.’ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.’ He was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’” (Genesis 28:12-17)

You may recall how I ended last weekend’s Eucharistic reflection, quoting Jesus in the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of Saint Luke. Jesus would continue in Chapter 14 of St. Luke’s Gospel by stating: *“And whosoever doth not carry his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.”* (Luke 14:27). I believe this verse to be quite helpful in our reflection upon the prefigurement of the Eucharist found within the dream of Jacob’s ladder from Genesis Chapter 28. We begin with a question. What is the cross in our lives Jesus is asking us to carry? Before anyone publicly offers an answer, I suggest this for your consideration. Our cross is our mortality.

Mortality may not have been our first thought. I, along with others present, may have first thought of a particular sin we are struggling with or our general weakness to sin. If we were given an infinite amount of time, could we not overcome the many sins that plague us currently? However, if we only have a limited time, then the need to work through these sins becomes crucial. And, as our own personal histories attest, this will only be accomplished with the assistance of a greater power outside of ourselves, i.e., God.

Returning to Jacob’s dream in Genesis, our interpretation can be viewed in this fashion. Jacob (man) is born to live, for a limited time, in this material reality. Despite how good or bad both Jacob’s and our lives have become, deep down we all knowingly yearn for something more. Saint Augustine described this desire with his famous line taken from his Confessions: *“Our hearts are restless, until they rest in Thee, O Lord.”* God desires for us to attain this supreme good, our eternal blessedness. He is this Supreme Good we long for. One would think mankind would prioritize God as the Principle Source of all his desires. However, like Jacob, we are tempted to remain asleep to this need. God is the one who must act first. He must inspire us to wake up from our perpetual intellectual and moral drowsiness. His Word would become incarnate in our flesh (in Mary’s womb) and serve as that ladder joining heaven and Earth; God and man (Hypostatic Union). But wait, there’s more! In the time of Jesus, ladders and crosses were made of wood, and both could be used to elevate a body above the Earth. The Fathers of the Church saw in the ladder of Jacob and the Cross of Christ, a similarity, which allowed mankind to ascend to God, our Father. But wait, there’s more! Jesus willed His Body, the Church, would be formed through His Passion and Death and guided by His Holy Spirit after His Ascension. We believe and profess His Church, guided by His Spirit, through her Sacred Scriptures, her historical Tradition and her Sacraments, was destined to become a ladder lifting us up to God. At this very moment, all of these (Christ, the Church, our Scriptures, this Eucharist) are active in elevating us toward the blessed life with God we call Heaven.

Before we conclude this reflection, may I offer one last point. When Jacob awoke from this dream, he renamed the location from Luza to Bethel. One may wonder why this addition of a name change is important? The name Luza meant “detachment,” while Bethel meant “house of God.” My family, one will ascend to the House of God (Bethel), through first detaching (Luza) oneself of the things which keep us dreamingly engaged with this passing material reality, the most important of these, our unwillingness to carry our cross, our mortality. Our clock is ticking. I ask we pray and offer sacrifices this Lent for all good people to wake up before their individual alarms ring and it be too late. There is no snooze button when death’s alarm sounds.