

Turning Our Will Over to the Father
March 13, 2022, Second Sunday of Lent
Gospel of Luke 9.28b-36
Fr. John

In our readings today we hear about Abram's covenant or agreement with God which would entail his departure along with his wife, family and belongings to settle in a new land. Abram was 75 years old - not exactly the time of life to make a career change. It would take a great deal of willpower for him to leave all the security of his homeland to journey to the land to which God had chosen for him.

St. Paul in the second reading, urges the Corinthian community to fully trust in God Who calls them to make the transition from their former way of life to follow Christ.

The gospel reading presents the transfiguration of Jesus on Mt. Tabor. It presented three of his disciples with a new way of seeing Jesus - a way that will lead them to turning their will over to Christ prompted by the divine voice: 'This is my Son, the Chosen - listen to Him!'

Last Sunday Fr. Brad spoke about the first step of conversion: that of admitting that there is a Higher Power than that of our own personal ego and that left to ourselves we are powerless. This, in itself, is a huge step for any of us. Yet, it's one thing to admit it in our minds and hearts. It is quite another thing to begin to **act** on that realization. In other words, to **actually turn our will** over to God's agenda. Willpower is the next step in a conversion process. In fact, step 3 of the 12 Step process for recovery states: that we, 'made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand God.'

A friend of mine would often jokingly say that whenever she was faced with a challenging task, she would just wait until the urge passed to tackle it.

Groucho Marx, the famous Hollywood movie comedian of another era, once remarked: "If there's a will...I want to be in it!" [But that's a different type of will].

But more seriously, most of us struggle with the will to actually carry out what is right. Even a great giant of faith like St. Paul admitted his inward tendencies in his letter to the Romans [7:18]. '... for though the will to do good is in me, the performance is not, with the result that instead of doing the good things I want to do, I carry out the sinful things I do not want. When I act against my will, then, it is not my true self doing it but sin that lives within me.'

It's no wonder that all the New Year's resolutions that some people make in early January are long forgotten by February. Our lack of willpower is fed by all kinds of fears. What if God is asking too much of me? Am I getting in over my head? What will others think of me if they see me acting strangely or at least differently from what I usually do?

Yes, it's hard to break old habits, whether it's a substance addiction, patterns of destructive behavior, or an ideology that has become so deeply embedded in us that we feel imprisoned by it.

Our willpower is based upon the degree to which we believe in the good to which we are committed. That is being borne out at this very moment by the will of the people of Ukraine in defending their homeland against that of a Russian military, many of whom

are probably less convinced of why they are even there destroying lives and property.

Willpower has a lot to do with creating the energy to **surpass** what one is thought to be capable of. Didn't Jesus tell his disciples that their virtues must **exceed** that of the scribes and Pharisees? With us as human beings it is impossible...with God all things are possible.

We must be careful, however, how we use that willpower to make sure that is **not** the **will-to-power**, forcing our will on others but rather the **turning of our will to God**.

The transfiguration of Jesus gave the disciples a glimpse of the glorified Christ - a vision that they would carry for the rest of their lives - a vision that was powerful enough to turn their will over to God, the Creator.

Turning our will over to the Father is, I suspect still a work in progress for most of us. Like Paul, we can be frustrated at times by our failures and our lack of progress. We can become victims of disappointment and disillusionment. We may even give in to the temptation of 'throwing in the towel' and giving up on ourselves. But God never gives up on us. He believes in us more than we even believe in ourselves.

Steps 1 and 2 of the AA 12 step process call a person to reflection and acceptance. However, step 3 is a call to **affirmative action**. But that affirmative action doesn't necessarily begin with giant steps but rather smaller incremental ones.

So for example, if my house is a complete mess and it looks overwhelming and I don't know where to begin. So I just sit and grow more anxious and nothing gets done. So we say: Well at least I can pick up the old newspapers. I can do that much. And we do it! And the fact that we've accomplished that much gives us the confidence and the energy to maybe clean up the kitchen and eventually the living room, the study, the bedroom until we realize that the whole house is clean from top to bottom.

God is patient with us. He understands when we can only turn part of our will over to Him at a time. A recovering alcoholic, for example, never says to himself that he will never drink again for as long as he lives. Rather he will say 'I'm not going to drink today!' Day to day commitments rather than big promises are more realistic. One day at a time...one step at a time.

The question now is just how and what specific means shall we use to let God in. Every person, actively involved in the 12 step AA process of recovery has a sponsor - someone to whom they can call at any time whenever their willpower is at a very low ebb. Perhaps that might be a good model for all of us, who might be called 'recovering Christians' to have a trusted friend, a confidant, spiritual director, a confessor - an instrument through whom God works to help bring us to spiritual sobriety.

Lent is an opportunity for us to ask ourselves some serious questions about our relationship with God, with others and within ourselves. Where are these lacking or in disrepair? What **specific steps** are we willing to take to heal the wounds?

The initial step, of course, is to invite God to give us the **grace for the WILLPOWER** that we need to do what needs to be done. As our psalm reminds us today: 'The Lord is my light and salvation, whom shall I fear; 'The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid.' Acting on the basis of that might be a good start.