

I want to tell you about Moses because today's first reading is for me part of one of the most unfair stories in the Bible.

You know about Moses. He was born when the Hebrews were in Egypt. The new pharaoh, fearing that the slaves were threatening to take more power, ordered that the newborn boys be thrown into the river. When Moses was born, his mother hid him in the reeds where Pharaoh's daughter found him and raised him. Moses asked God his name at the burning bush, before Pharaoh he pled freedom for his people, he survived 10 plagues in Egypt, he led his people through the waters of the Red Sea, he received the 10 commandments on Mount Sinai, spent 40 years wandering through the desert with ungrateful people, he brought water from a rock and manna from the sky. At the age of 120 he had perfect vision and could still father a child. After such a career, the greatest day in Moses's life should have been the day he ended his desert journey by leading the people into the promised land. There he could have had the satisfaction of knowing that everything he had worked for had been worth it, he would have been paid for a job well done. But it never happened. Do you know why? When they got to the last hill before entering the promised land, when they could look from Mount Nebo across the Jordan Valley into the land flowing with milk and honey, Moses died. He never entered the promised land of Israel. Moses died. And I think that's terribly unfair. In the first reading today, Moses describes for the people the great land which lays before them. He's very noble about the whole matter, which amazes me because he knows he'll never get there. If anyone deserved to lead the Hebrews across the Jordan, it was Moses, but it was Joshua who did it.

Life is not always fair. This is a terribly painful lesson to learn. And if you haven't learned it yet, you will. This is especially hard for people used to capitalism: we get what we pay for, and if we don't, we scream until we do. Society teaches us that if we work very hard throughout life, we will succeed. It often happens that way, but sometimes it doesn't. You may deserve a better job than what you're offered, better grades than what you're given, a better product than the one you bought. But even though you deserve it, you may not get it.

When this happens, it is not a sign that God hates you. It is a sign that God questions you. Now that life is unfair, what are you going to do? He gives you a choice. You can be angry, or you can be bitter.

Moses knew he would die before he could lead the people into the promised land. I'm sure he was sad, I'm sure he was angry. But because he was such a great leader, he was also accepting. We don't remember Moses because of the success of his mission--he never completed it. We remember him because he accepted his mission with dedication, patience, and love. We remember him not because of his destination, but because of his journey.

And God will remember us not by the successes we've achieved but by how we persevered when life was unfair.

*Not. Lent 1.82*