Readings for March 8, 2020 – Second Sunday of Lent

My Beloved Son

Jesus sees that his disciples do not understand all he has been saying about his suffering, death and resurrection. So Jesus takes them to the mountain to reveal to them the divine origins of this path. Once they comprehend the divine Jesus, they will “rise without fear” and “listen to him.” They will learn to be open to God’s will and be able to engage the difficulty of Jesus’ way. - John Shea.

Opening Prayer: Lord Jesus, Help me today to hear your words, to see you with my whole being, so that your words can become flesh in me and become a dwelling place for you. Amen.

Reading 1  GN 12:1-4A

The LORD said to Abram: “Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you. “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you.” Abram went as the LORD directed him.

Responsorial Psalm  PS 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22

R. (22) Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.
Upright is the word of the LORD, and all his works are trustworthy. He loves justice and right; of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.
R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.
See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him, upon those who hope for his kindness, To deliver them from death and preserve them in spite of famine.
R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.
Our soul waits for the LORD, who is our help and our shield. May your kindness, O LORD, be upon us who have put our hope in you.
R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.
Beloved: Bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God. He saved us and called us to a holy life, not according to our works but according to his own design and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began, but now made manifest through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus, who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and do not be afraid.” And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone. As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, “Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

Related Reflections

Background:

On the second Sunday of Lent in each Lectionary cycle the Gospel reading proclaims the story of Jesus' Transfiguration, each time from a different Gospel. This feast calls to our attention the importance of this event in Jesus' life, and is reported in each of the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

In each Gospel, Jesus takes three of his disciples—Peter, James, and John—to a high mountain. While they are there, Elijah and Moses appear with Jesus. In Matthew's and Mark's Gospel, there is reference to a conversation among Jesus, Elijah, and Moses, but only Luke's Gospel includes the detail that this conversation is about what Jesus will accomplish in Jerusalem.

Elijah and Moses are both significant figures in the history of Israel. Moses led the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and received from Yahweh the Ten Commandments. Appearing with Jesus at his Transfiguration, Moses represents the Law, which guides the lives of the Jewish people. Elijah is remembered as one of the most important prophets of Israel who helped the Israelites stay faithful to Yahweh. Some believe that Elijah’s return would signal the coming of the Messiah for the Jewish people.
This belief is evidenced in the question posed by Jesus' disciples after they have witnessed the Transfiguration. The appearance of these two important figures from Israel's history indicates Jesus' continuity with the Law and the prophets. They also reveal that Jesus is the fulfillment of all that was promised to the people of Israel.

Upon seeing Jesus with Elijah and Moses and having witnessed his Transfiguration, Peter offered to construct three tents for them. Luke's Gospel reports that Peter's offer was made in confusion. As if in reply to Peter's confusion, a voice from heaven spoke, affirming Jesus as God's Son and commanding the disciples to obey him. This voice from heaven recalls the voice that was heard at Jesus' baptism.

In his Transfiguration, we see an anticipation of the glory of Jesus' Resurrection. In each of the reports of the Transfiguration, Jesus instructed the disciples to keep secret what they had seen until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. The disciples' confusion continued as they wondered what Jesus meant by “rising from the dead.” Until they also witness his passion and death, the disciples cannot possibly understand Jesus' Transfiguration. We, however, have the benefit of hindsight. In our hearing of it, we see in this event an anticipation of Jesus' Resurrection, a foreshadowing of Christ's glory in heaven, and the promise of our own resurrection.

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Night is not forever. It is a prelude to day.

In the transfiguration, Jesus shook off the grime of daily night and showed apostles the daily freshness of God that dwelt deep within him. “Yes, I am God, the Ancient One,” he seemed to say in the First Reading, “the one that all heaven adores. But I am also that same loving God transformed into the roughness of your daily life. I am transfiguring here to show you the Glory within me, Glory that I will give quietly to those who will receive my Spirit—even within the smudge and smear of daily life.”


A Window Into Perfection: Yesterday I spent five hours hearing confessions, at three different times. And one thought kept coming back to me as each penitent rolled into the confessional. I noticed that people seem to want God to come into their lives and reverse all that has gone bad... they want God to take them back in time to before they committed the sin. As if the sin never happened. But that’s not how God works. One of the theological truths of Christianity is that God doesn’t come to reverse the sins of mankind... he comes to redeem the sins of mankind.

This scene on the top of Mount Tabor is a perfect example of what I’m talking about. The Transfiguration is actually more common in our lives than we realize. In fact, in this story, we are Peter, James and John. They are our stand-ins. It’s a story that represents something profound for you and me... a story about Jesus meeting us in the mess of life as part of his redemption of the mess of life. Peter, James, and John... simple and flawed fishermen.
Peter was pushy and willful. He would end up denying his best friend Jesus three times and then be called to lead the Church as our first Pope. James and John later in the gospels were arrogant – wanting places of honor – to sit at Jesus’ right and left.

Their lives were messy by their own faults but also by the circumstance in which they lived. Jews living with an occupying force breathing down their necks at all times in the Romans. Fishing every day… we hear that there were days when the catch was dubious at best. I presume they had mouths to feed and boats to keep up and debts to pay. It had to be a difficult situation, a messy life. And now they’re on this mountain-top, and the miracle of the Transfiguration confronts them. Like a window into the perfection of God, they peer in and see Jesus transfigured, glorified in pure white, showing his perfection with Moses and Elijah. It’s a miracle that seems to pull them out of the mess for a moment of peace, wonder… and perfection.

Peter, recognizing this, sees his chance to erase all the bad… to reverse all the difficulties… all that is wrong in his life. He never wants to leave. You can’t blame him really. He offers to build three houses up on the mountain and never go back into the mess. And Jesus, wise as he is challenging, brings them just as quickly back into their reality. They return back down the mountain where life continues. He could have accepted Peter’s offer and they could have stayed there forever but he didn’t. He met these regular guys in the mess of lives, took the time to reveal his redeeming perfection in a singular moment of clarity, and then returned them to the chaos of the human condition. It was like the Sacrament of Confession before there was any such thing.

So what does this tell us about our own reality? It tells us to be people of hope without requiring that God prove himself by freeing us from our difficulties. These three guys would end up giving their lives for the faith. Peter was crucified upside down one day on a hill in Rome called the Vatican hill, James and John also martyred for their love of Him. Fr. Ron Rolheiser writes beautifully about this transfiguring hope.

He says, God has promised that history (our private histories, our communal history, and cosmic history) will one day come together in an ecstatic oneness, a heaven, a paradise, a community of life around Christ and in God within which there will be no tears and no death. It will not be a community of life focused on “food and drink” but one that takes its very breath from love, justice, peace, friendship, affection, and shared delight in a common spirit, the Holy Spirit. Then he explains, and what power will bring this about? The power that God showed in the resurrection of Jesus, the power to redeem what’s been lost, to write straight with crooked lines, and to bring people together, despite and beyond Hatred, sin, selfishness, and mistakes.

Hmmm… sounds like Confession to me… When I consider the grace of Confession in the light of the Transfiguration, a window of hope into the glory of God in a world that is hard for pretty much everyone, when I think of every time you come into that confessional, for the rest of this Lent and beyond, I will consider it a chance for you to see God’s glory and to hope in that glory… for just a few minutes… like Peter, James, and John.

– Posted Feb. 21, 2016 by St. Louis Catholic Church, Austin, Texas.

“God is our clothing,
that wraps, clasps and encloses us,
so as to never leave us.”

- Julian of Norwich
Sometimes, without knowing it, we can get locked into our own world and our particular situation. We can lose sight of the fact that we are part of a much bigger world.

In today’s gospel, Jesus takes some of his friends away from the business of the village and marketplace. He invites them to travel with him as he makes his way up the mountain. This is not unusual. We know from the gospels that Jesus often went off by himself to the mountains to pray. While they were there praying, something wild and wonderful happened. Jesus was transfigured; he was changed; his face shone like the son, and his clothes became as white as light. Imagine how surprised, shocked and taken aback those with Jesus were. Once composed, Peter utters the famous words, ‘Lord, it is wonderful for us to be here’. But more importantly than what was said, is what they heard; ‘This is my Son, the beloved, he enjoys my favour, listen to him’.

These words are as much meant for us today as they were for those who first heard them. Today, we are surrounded by news all the time. Not all of it is good news; some of it may even be fake news. The word and message that Jesus speaks to us and offers is life-giving and life-changing. The words of Jesus, nourish, nurture, and sustain us, if we open our hearts and lives to hearing it. As John’s gospel reminds us, Lord, you have the message of eternal life.

The Transfiguration gives us a brief and fleeting glimpse of Jesus in all his glory. It is a taste of what is to come. It is offered to encourage and challenge us in our daily lives. It reminds us that our lives are far more than what see, hear and experience every day. It is not just a matter getting through the day. Being a follower of Jesus is about living with meaning, purpose and hope. The transfiguration not only offers us a glimpse of Jesus in all his glory, it also offers each of us a foretaste of what God promises each of us in the fullness of the Kingdom.

We may never experience anything as powerful as the Transfiguration. But every day in countless and seemingly small ways God does break into our world and our daily lives. Every time we experience a moment of peace, joy, reconciliation or forgiveness, God is with us. Every time that we reach out to help another person is a moment of transfiguration both for ourselves and for those we help. Each time somebody shows care and concern for us is a moment when God is reaches out to us.

This week, let us open our hearts so that we may hear Jesus speaking to us. May we slow down and look for moments of small, but important, times of transfiguration in our own ordinary daily lives.

- Michael Moore OMI - www.oblates.ie

Jesus took Peter, James, and John up to a mountaintop (some believe this is Mt. Hermon), where he was transfigured before them. Suddenly, the disciples saw a glimpse of Christ’s divinity and the merging of heaven and earth. A friend of mine is dying of cancer. She is closer to heaven than most of us understand. She is standing on Mt. Hermon, being transformed. I can sense it in her spirit, and in her writing. In my grief over her illness, I am in awe of her brilliance. The space between heaven and earth is narrow. In rare moments like these – when a friend is dying or some miracle happens, we see these
“thin places.” When I am burdened by the evil and sadness in the world, I cling to these dazzling white moments. - Karen Beattie, A Book of Grace-Filled Days, 2018.

Suggested Meditation

Spend 5-10 minutes thinking quietly about this reflection below, from Franciscan Media.org. Then write some thoughts. Share with the group, if you are willing.

One of the Transfiguration accounts is read on the second Sunday of Lent each year. The Gospel for the first Sunday of Lent, by contrast, is the story of the temptation in the desert—affirmation of Jesus’ humanity. The two distinct but inseparable natures of the Lord were a subject of much theological argument at the beginning of the Church’s history; it remains hard for believers to grasp.

Think about the way we see Jesus in both of these Gospel accounts – Jesus tempted and Jesus transfigured. What are the contrasts in these accounts? What larger truths are evident in both?

What does Jesus want to reveal to us in both settings? What does this mean to me, right now, in a world that is far from the mountain top?

This glimpse of Jesus’ divinity helped his disciples to grow in faith and reverence. Am I allowing my faith to grow as God wants it to grow? What might be limiting this growth?

Discussion Questions:

The disciples don’t seem to understand what they are witnessing and are not fully attentive to what Jesus is trying to convey to them. What is your reaction to that? What does this say for us?

What are some ways we can listen more attentively to Jesus?

The voice of God breaks through into our world to tell us that Jesus is the “beloved son.” What do you think means for us?

In what other times or places do you think the voice of God breaks through to our worldly existence?

Prayer Suggestion: The Glorified Christ (Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.)

Glorious Lord Christ: the divine influence secretly diffused and active in the depths of matter, and the dazzling center where all the innumerable fibers of the manifold meet; power as implacable as the world and as warm as life; you whose forehead is of the whiteness of the snow, whose eyes are of fire, and whose feet are brighter than molten gold; you whose hands imprison the stars; you are the first and the last, the living and the dead and the risen again; you who gather into your exuberant unity every beauty,
every affinity, every energy, every mode of existence; it is you to whom my being cried out with a desire as vast as the universe, “In truth you are my Lord and my God.”