

*Readings*

Gn 12:1-4a

Ps 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22.

2 Tm 1:8b-10

Mt 17:1-9

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Every year, on the second Sunday of Lent, we recount the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountaintop. We hear that Jesus “takes leave of” the busy and demanding activity of his ministry and steps away to devote time to prayer. Accompanied by three disciples, Peter, James, and John (I would suggest they represent dimensions of who we are as followers of Jesus), Jesus is “transfigured” while in the presence of Moses and Elijah.

Following last week’s story of the temptations in the desert, we are now invited to witness and ponder this awe-filled event in which the glory of Jesus quite literally shines forth in the transfigured person of the only Son of God, he who is the Word of God enfleshed in our human condition. And this event, like so many others, leads us (I hope) to ask the all-important question, “So what?” And so: What does this event mean for me and you - now, in this time, in this place where God has planted us ?

These 40 or so days of Lent invite us to prepare for, if you will, the transfiguration of our world precisely because of what we celebrate on Easter Sunday: that death leads to life, to new life, to everlasting life - as God has desired from the very beginning of time as we know it. Pope Francis has suggested that in this Lenten season of 2017 we consider three particular themes: (1) The Word of God is gift; (2) The “Other” is gift; (3) Sin blinds us.

In my view, it follows that you and I are asked to consider ways in which our life might need a kind of “transfiguration” (or, perhaps better, a transformation) in order to better recognize the gifts that are offered us, and to avoid being blinded to them by the reality of sin that so easily obscures them. What might I need to “fast from” or turn away from that would be an obstacle to

what God desires for me? How might you or I better enter into the fullness of life that has been won for us, to grow in our union with God as we also grow in our union as sisters and brothers in Christ?

In all honesty and humility, we must admit the challenge of the invitation we receive - because the rub is that something or someone needs to change, and we are not always so open to that! The very word “transfiguration” or “transformation” implies and requires such change. The words Jesus spoke in calling his disciples, “Come, follow me,” certainly required risk-taking on the part of those called - because life, as they knew it, would surely be different. Jesus took Peter, James, and John along to be witnesses - but also to be responders to what must have challenged them as individuals and as companions on the way with Jesus. Remember that they had to come down from that mountain-top experience to continue living their lives - in ways that would now challenge them as never before. “So what now?” must have been the question on their minds as they returned to their everyday, ordinary lives. Of course nothing could be quite as ordinary after an event such as the Transfiguration!

Here is where the second theme suggested by Pope Francis seems to enter into deeper consideration. Jesus, and the disciples, return to the public ministry and Jesus goes about teaching and curing and reaching out to others in their hunger and thirst for peace and wholeness in life. If we have learned nothing else, we have learned that the ministry of Jesus was always about “the other,” and never about himself. Even if it took a while, the disciples began to realize that this was a choice they would also have to make if they were to follow in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The other lesson to be learned was that this never happens in isolation - and so we need to be open to the presence of others in our life who may be companions on the way, or who may challenge and/or affirm us as we strive to change our lives and enter more deeply into the intimate relationship God has offered to us.

But the heart of the Good News is not about what we are required to do, it is about what God has done for us in the gift of Jesus the Christ: Jesus came into our world to dwell in our hearts. We can know him and hear his voice, we can love him, and we can even be changed to become more like him.

We ourselves may not see Jesus transfigured with our physical eyes, but as we open our hearts in prayer, as we read his word, it is possible for us to see Jesus with the eyes of our heart,

with eyes of faith, to know how great his love is for us. For to know Jesus as Lord and Messiah, Jesus must be revealed to us by God himself!

Our readings and our liturgy today offer us the opportunity to glimpse the meaning of what we gather to do, the meaning of what we are called to celebrate with God, and who we are called to be as followers of Jesus. The transfiguration of Jesus should give us tremendous hope if we look forward to eternal life with God. For the transfiguration of Jesus gives us a glimpse of what we will be like in heaven - transformed in body and in character.

Out of the cloud came a voice that said "This is my beloved Son on whom my favor rests." God offers the same pronouncement upon each of us, his daughters and sons, if we but open ourselves to his revelation, if we but follow his commandments, if we but seek to grow in his image and likeness, to grow in faith and in fidelity.

Our call is not to a new land, our call is not to be a new people. Our call is to new life as God's holy people - new life made possible by God's gift of his Son Jesus for us, new life made possible because Jesus has conquered death, new life because Jesus continues to offer us the gift of his saving grace.

Let us also rejoice and be glad, for it is good that we are here: to celebrate what God has done for us, and to be transformed by that!