

18 Second Sunday of Lent Year A March 8, 2020
Genesis 12:1-4 Psalm 33 2Timothy 1:8-10 Matthew 17:1-9

We have just listened to the Gospel account of the Transfiguration of Jesus. The word *Transfiguration* means *change or transformation*. We might expect to hear Scripture passages during Lent that call us to *conversion* and *repentance* or that speak to us of God's eternal mercy. But Lenten practices by themselves will be less meaningful, indeed the whole season of Lent would be without purpose if it did not ultimately lead us to transformation.

In our Gospel story today, we can almost sense that Jesus and the Apostles are feeling quite discouraged. Jesus is feeling down because of the struggles of misunderstanding and hatred that He feels are closing in around Him. The religious leaders are opposing Him, the synagogues are refusing Him, and the towns are so hostile that He has taken to preaching in the wilderness because His life is in danger. As well, Jesus is struggling with the decision about taking the road to Jerusalem to the place of His death.

As well, the Apostles are feeling down because Jesus has shared with them the sober prediction of His passion and death. What a multitude of thoughts must be going through their minds as they reflect on Jesus' words about His suffering, His rejection by His own people, and His pending death and resurrection. But as they move towards Jerusalem, Jesus stops and takes a detour to go up Mount Tabor. Jesus chooses Peter, James, and John to go up the mountain with Him.

On top of the mountain Jesus stops to pray. While He is praying, His face is bathed in light and He becomes transfigured. Then at His side appear Moses, the lawgiver, and Elijah, the prophet. Only Luke's Gospel tells us what is shared in the communication between Jesus, Moses and Elijah. "*They were speaking of His departure, which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.*"

The Greek word which St. Luke uses for Jesus' "departure" is *exodus*, a word which reminds His hearers of the great journey of the Jewish people out of Egypt to liberation after 400 years of slavery. Jesus' journey to His death and resurrection will be a new Exodus, a new liberation for the people, a new liberation from the slavery of sin.

Moses and Elijah testify that Jesus will fulfill both the Law and the prophecies of the prophets found in the Old Testament. Deep in conversation with them, Jesus is made aware of the full extent of His suffering and death. It is only through Jesus' passion and death on the cross that He will come to the glory of His Resurrection.

Peter is awestruck and wants to build three tents, one each for Moses, Elijah and Jesus. But the Apostles hear the voice of God the Father say, "*This is My Son, My Chosen; listen to Him!*" Jesus is more than just another prophet, *He is God's Chosen Son*. Here are words that all people must hear and accept if they are to be transformed and changed. After God has spoken, the vision of Jesus' Transfiguration passes and the moment of insight into Christ's real nature is over.

The Transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor made the Apostles aware of the Divine presence of this Man with whom they have walked, and to establish beyond all doubt in their minds and hearts that Jesus is the Son of God. Further, this confirms to the Apostles that He will be rejected and put to death. But Jesus' dying will not be the last word, for He will rise from the dead on the third day.

Sunday is our time on the mountain when we can share in God's mystery and experience our own *transformation* here at our Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Most Holy Eucharist is the very heart of our Sunday worship. Just as the heart pumps life into the rest of the body, so the Mass pumps Christ's life into the Church and into our life. Being at Mass is our way of standing with the Apostles on Mount Tabor. In the Mass, God's love allows us to taste on earth the joys of heaven that await us.

If we ask Jesus to spiritually transform us while we are here at Mass, we can prepare the world to receive and accept the salvation Jesus has won for us. As we ourselves are transformed, we will be able to reflect *God's glory*, and the whole world *will be touched by the love of Jesus*. The Holy Mass is our personal transfiguration of Jesus' love.

We are all called every week to the mountain of prayer here at Sunday Mass. It is here where we learn to leave behind the false gods as Abraham did in today's First Reading. It is here where we come to know the grace of a new and eternal life to which St. Paul refers to in the Second Reading. It is here where we receive Christ's power to guide us in difficult days as Jesus says to us, "*Rise and do not be afraid.*"

We notice in the Gospel that Jesus was praying before His Transfiguration. One of the chief characteristics of Jesus' life is His commitment to prayer. Our transformation is not likely to take place without us also praying. Jesus says that what matters in our relationship with God shows forth in our prayer life.

Jesus wants us to learn to open our hearts to God in prayer and receive His life and His love. In the Book of Acts, Luke tells us that as the Apostles learned how to pray, they became effective ministers of the Gospel, understanding God's purposes and willingly laying down their lives for the sake of God's kingdom (Acts 4:23-31).

Jesus invites all of us to come to know Him in prayer. He has already worked wonders in our lives, yet in His generosity, He wants to give us much more. As we behold His glory in prayer, He will fill our hearts with awe and gratitude. The Holy Spirit will reveal Jesus to us. He will change our hearts and teach us how to know God's presence throughout our days.

In order to be transformed into Christ-like people, we, too, need to experience Jesus in our prayer life. Our prayers can transform us. We are called to be people of prayer, so this might be the right time for us to review our life of prayer.

Strengthened and renewed in your prayer life, you will have what you need to live your faith as you meet those challenges, trials, and stresses of your everyday lives. In our early Lenten journey, today might be a good day to stop and take stock of where our prayer life has brought us and where we need to go.

Let us pray that we will be open to the transformation, the change in our lives that our God is inviting us to experience during this time of Lent. Let us pray also that we may find the courage to free ourselves of the sin that keeps us away from that perfect friendship we want with God, and that our loving God wants to have with us.

This time of Lent now gives us the ideal opportunity to seek this desired transformation in our hearts and our communities. For as Peter said, "*it is good that we are here.*" It is indeed good that we are here today at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, for it is only when we are present to Our Lord that we can be open to His Word and to the glory He desires to share with us.