

**Sermon for the 2nd Sunday in Lent – Feb 21, 2016**  
Readings: Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 9:28b-36

Today we begin the 3rd week in our Lenten journey.

The first Sunday of Lent we meditated on the temptations of Jesus, and today, the 2nd Sunday, on the Transfiguration of Jesus.

The focal point of the event of Transfiguration is a mountain...

- Going up the mountain
- The moment of grace on top of the mountain
- Coming down from the mountain top after that experience

The gospel reading of Ash Wednesday set for us a spiritual journey of the season of Lent: fasting, prayer and almsgiving. Lent is an intense way of living out our Christian life. Fasting, prayer and almsgiving are ways to go beyond ourselves, extend our hearts to God (vertical dimension – in prayer), and to stretch out our hands to our neighbors (the horizontal dimension – in charity). These two dimensions of our Christian life journey are like going up the mountain and coming down.

When we first began this undertaking on Ash Wednesday, we heard the words of Jesus in the gospel:

“Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them...

When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing...

“When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to God in secret...

“When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to God who is hidden.”

Last week, as we meditated on Christ’s temptations by the devil, Fr. Tom spoke of those things which cause us to move away from God...the glamorous, shimmery things that catch our attention, but lead and distract us from our connection to God...”Satan comes as an angel of light.’

At the Transfiguration, Jesus “took with him Peter, John and James and went up the mountain to pray.” It is God who enables us to seek the ‘God presence’ in prayer.

And just as it is God who invited Moses and Elijah to the mountain-top, it is God who invites us to enter into an intimate relationship in prayer.

Jesus did not arrive on our earth in radiance and splendor. He came as an innocent child dependent on his mother and earthly father for survival.

Jesus takes three of his apostles with him. There is a community on top of the mountain. Even if God invites us personally to an encounter, it is often in the context

of the community. And it is up to us to respond to God's invitation. Peter and John and James responded to the invitation of Jesus to go up the mountain.

It's hard to even imagine what the Transfiguration looked like. We're told that "his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white..." But any picture that tries to capture this scene will most likely fall short. Even in our imagination, we can only get some small sense of the overwhelming experience.

But now, on top of the mountain, the three disciples are privileged to witness an appearance of God despite their own inability to be present to God. Luke tells us, "Peter and his companions were heavy with sleep... They see Jesus in the company of two great men in the history of Israel: Moses and Elijah. Moses stands for the Law and Elijah for the Prophets, showing that Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament.

What follows then is a demonstration of who Jesus really is: "a cloud came and covered them with shadow; from the tradition of the book of Exodus, 'cloud' is a powerful symbol of the presence of God. As if this was not enough, "And a voice came from the cloud saying, 'This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him!" This was for the disciples an experience of God in the person of Jesus. Jesus was the divine being Peter had already recognized.

Going up the mountain is our choice, in responding to God's invitation. But what actually happens on the mountain-top is the Grace of God. It is not up to us control it. The experience of God may be transient. We are not able to hold on to it. We are not able to pitch our tents on the mountain-top. But its after-effect is what we carry forward to our daily encounters.

Luke tells us that "The disciples kept silent and, at that time, told no one what they had seen." So too, our Lenten experience is meant to offer us the possibility of experiencing God more deeply, and to carry that experience to our encounter with other people.

The effect on the Apostles wasn't that, from this moment on, they were only faithful and never wavered. God's grace, always available to each of us, doesn't simply override our human nature. The Apostles were still human, and despite this and many other privileged encounters with God, they were still capable of giving in to fear and not turning to the help of God's grace.

In our own lives of faith, we can experience something very similar. God is revealed to us in some unmistakable way. We encounter God and all doubt is cast aside. Then, almost in the blink of an eye, we find ourselves struggling once again and unsure of whether God is even there. It's in those times, down in the valleys, that we must remember the experience of the mountain top.

Today, as at every Sunday liturgy, Jesus comes to us in a way that surpasses even his transfigured human body - in the Eucharist. The difficulty is that we (sometimes) can't see this reality as the Apostles did for that short moment. We can't look at the Eucharist with our eyes and comprehend its reality because it is beyond our ability to understand. We must see through the eyes of our faith, which tell us that what Jesus promised, he will provide. When we see that reality, then we, like Peter, will also say, "Lord, it is good to be here."

This gift is made available to us here as often as we come here. We receive the same gifts the Apostles did that day, and even more. We don't need to climb a distant mountain to see that promise come to be. We have only to ask for the grace to see what has already been given to us, and that we have the great privilege of coming to this altar to receive.

Whenever we think of Jesus, a flash of recognition must reach us from him - and him to us. Hopefully we all have some glimpse of this when we pray, and 'know what we are saying.' We are recognized - and we recognize. We are loved - and we love. We are spoken to - and we speak, words given to us by Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.

May we all have own mountain-top experiences, receiving God's grace, enabling us to be transformed into the very persons God wishes us to become.

Deacon Greg Cecere

February 21, 2016

(with excerpts by Sahaya G. Selvam, SDB; Fr. Duncan Campbell O.P.; Fr. Daniel Richards)

## **LUKE 9:18-36**

*Peter's Confession About Jesus.\**

18 Once when Jesus was praying in solitude, and the disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" 19 They said in reply, "John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, 'One of the ancient prophets has arisen.'" 20 Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said in reply, "The Messiah of God." 21 He rebuked them and directed them not to tell this to anyone.

22 He said, "The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised."