

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent + 13 March 2025 + Gen 15 :5-18+ Phil 3:17-4:1 + Lk 9:28-36

Years ago when I was in the seminary, I had the opportunity to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and to Mt. Tabor, which is the traditional location of the Transfiguration—the event that we just heard about in our Gospel. We celebrated Mass at the church that was built on the mountaintop, just as the sun was beginning to set in the western sky. The sunlight that came through the windows caused the gold vestments of the 3 priests who happened to be at Mass that day to shine, and for a moment, we were all able to bask in God’s glory on the Mountain. To top it all off, I got up early the next day to watch the sun rise, but a low cloud hung over the mountain. It was an experience that I will not forget, just as Peter, James, and John would never forget their mountaintop experience with the Lord.

So let’s look at some of the details of this mysterious event of the Transfiguration in our Gospel today. First, Luke notes that Jesus took with Him His closest disciples—Peter, John, and James—in order to pray. Communion with the Father was the bedrock of Jesus’ life. But this time He brings along His friends, so that they can experience His true glory. We too want to ‘see’ the glory of God; to know He is real. But if we don’t pray, we never will. This is one of the many reasons why we have focused so heavily as a parish on prayer lately. And that is, God is made known, in prayer, to those who are committed to prayer.

So, why did Jesus allow His closest friends to see His glory in such an incredible way? Well, just before this episode in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus makes the startling revelation that He would suffer, be rejected, and killed. And then he goes on to say: *If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.* Yikes! Now recall that Lent, in a certain sense, is meant to help us walk with the Lord each year in His suffering, passion, and death. And yet sometimes our lives feel like one long Lent, as we carry our Crosses—sometimes willingly, and sometimes grudgingly; especially when it gets heavy.

So just as last Sunday’s Gospel reminded us of the daily spiritual battle we face against the lies of the devil, the reason why the Church places this Gospel on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent is to remind us to never give up that fight. Just as the Transfiguration vision was given to the 3 disciples to reveal the glory that would shine forth in Christ *after* His passion and death, so it is also given to us to keep in mind when we feel the crushing weight of the Cross and are tempted to give up. Many years after the Transfiguration, St. Peter would reflect on this vision in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter, writing: *we [were] eyewitnesses of [the Lord’s] majesty...while we were with him on the holy mountain... we possess the prophetic message that is altogether reliable. You will do well to be attentive to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts (cf. 2 Pet 1:16-19).* In other words, remember Christ’s hidden glory! Keep it in mind, especially during your dark days, until that day when the light of Christ will shine on you for all eternity!

The next detail I'd like to focus on is the curious topic of conversation that Jesus has with Moses and Elijah: that is, *His 'exodus' that He was going to accomplish in Jerusalem*. Recall from last Sunday, how we spoke of the *Exodus* in the Old Testament. 'Exodus' means 'departure,' and in Scripture the Exodus refers to the sweeping narrative of Moses leading God's people from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. But this event, as central as it is to the Jewish faith, was just a shadow of the true and final Exodus: that is, Jesus' *departure* from this world by His death on the Cross. His Exodus would lead His people—all who have faith in Him—from slavery to sin to the real Promised Land of eternal life in heaven!

And so it is also significant that in His Transfiguration, Jesus speaks with Moses and Elijah: two of the greatest figures of the Old Testament. Moses represents the Old Law or Covenant—the gift that God gave the Israelites on Mount Sinai—teaching them how to live in right relationship with God, so as to become His own People and a light to all nations. Elijah represents the Prophets of the Old Covenant—the men who spoke the word of God to the People in order to turn their hearts back to God whenever they failed in keeping the Covenant. So, with Jesus' *Exodus* on the Cross, all that the Law taught, and all the Prophets proclaimed, was finally fulfilled. We are now brought into right relationship with God, and made into His people with new hearts, by being united to Christ. Jesus Himself is the New Covenant. We enter into this New Covenant by Baptism, by faith and repentance, and we renew it every time we receive His Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist.

The last detail I'd like to consider is how *a cloud came and cast a shadow over them*, while on the mountain. In the Old Testament, God led His People through the desert during the Exodus from Egypt by a cloud, as a visible symbol of His presence with them. God spoke to Moses and gave him the Old Law from within the cloud which covered Mt. Sinai. A cloud enveloped the Tent of Meeting, where Moses talked with the Lord in the desert. So here, on Mt. Tabor, God again is speaking with His people, but in a new and most immediate way: through His Son Jesus! It is no wonder then that the voice of the Father speaks from a cloud words that apply to us today just as much as they did to the 3 disciples: *This is my chosen Son; listen to him!*

You and I may not have had the privilege of being on that mountaintop with Jesus. But we have 3 eyewitnesses who saw the glory of God shining from within Him. We also have the witness of the Holy Spirit, dwelling in our hearts. And so we must keep our eyes fixed on the glory of Jesus as a lamp shining in the darkness of this world. The Lord promises us that if we are faithful, if we *take up our Cross* with Him, we will someday see His glory fully revealed. But it gets even better. So often we feel the weight of the Cross especially in our bodies: pain, sickness, disease, mental illness, you name it. So it is no small thing for St. Paul to proclaim in our 2nd reading today that Jesus will someday *change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body!* That is our hope: Lent is not forever. But Easter is.