

February 28, 2010

2nd Sunday of Lent

First Reading:

Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18

Second Reading: Philippians 3:17 – 4:1

Gospel Reading: Luke 9:28b-36

Homilist: Father Joe Pemberton

In 1996 I had the wonderful privilege of traveling to the Holy Land and one of the places that I got to see was Mount Tabor, the mount of the Transfiguration. I remember that the mountain itself is very high and very steep and our guide who took us there informed us that probably for Jesus, Peter, James and John it would have taken them a whole day's journey to get to the top of the mountain and they probably had to stop along the way to rest. I thought about that in relationship to what they experienced at the top of the mountain; the glory of the transfigured Lord, a sign of the resurrection, that as those disciples and Jesus himself struggled to get to the top of the mountain is a sign of the mystery of the cross because to journey to the resurrection is a difficult journey. It is a journey of challenge and testing, of suffering and death that culminate in the miracle of the resurrection. So, as the disciples and Jesus struggle to get to the top of the mountain it certainly is a sign of what was awaiting them, what was awaiting Jesus in just a few days and what would await the apostles after Jesus ascends to the Father. All the apostles, except St. John, suffered a martyr's death. They shed their blood for the gospel.

Let's look at what takes place at the top of the mountain; the miracle of the Transfiguration. In Luke's account, which we read today, he is the only one who tells us that the apostles, Peter,

James and John fall asleep as Jesus is transfigured in prayer and as Jesus is conversing with Moses and Elijah Peter, James and John are in a deep sleep and they only awaken when Jesus reveals the glory of His transfigured body. It's interesting to note that, also in Luke's gospel, just a few days later when Jesus goes to His passion and death, the night before He died as they go to the Mount of Olives in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus takes Peter, James and John again and what happens? They fall asleep as Jesus is in prayer anguishing over His upcoming suffering and death the next day.

What is this saying about the apostles and what does it say about us? The disciples do not want to see the reality of the cross. They do not want to see what it means to journey into the resurrection. They only want to see the resurrection and so their eyes are only opened at the moment of the Transfiguration. They are sound asleep as Jesus is discussing His exodus, His journey of suffering and death with Moses and Elijah journeying into Jerusalem. They do not see that. They have no part of it.

All the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, all say the same thing; that the apostles, the disciples did not understand who Jesus really was and they certainly did not understand the aspect of suffering in His life. They had no perception of that at all until after

the time of Pentecost when their bodies and hearts were filled with the wisdom of God and they saw all things as God sees.

There are really two transfigurations that happened at the top of this mountain for Jesus. One is the super-human experience, shall we say, of Jesus entering into the glory of God as He reveals His divine essence, the reality of who He is and all of His glory to the disciples, the glorified body. But there is a second transfiguration; it is the transfiguration of Jesus entering into the sub-human experience of anguish, pain and suffering of human misery, shall we say. Jesus connects to the heart of human suffering as He enters into the reality of what He's going to be doing in a few days. He begins to be transfigured in the midst of human misery and suffering. He himself enters into this and so there are two transfigurations going on at the top of the mountain: what He's going through as He's talking to Moses and Elijah and what He's going through as He reveals His glorified body. But they are not two separate entities. They are one. You cannot separate them in Christ. They are intimately connected with each other.

You and I are like the apostles in so many ways. We do not want to see the reality of the cross. If you do, raise your hand. Tell me because I don't. I struggle with that. I don't like to see the reality of the cross because what it means is that I must live as Jesus lived. I must journey suffering in death to the resurrection. In my human condition I so often cry out to see only the resurrection and it cannot be for one who says I am a follower of Jesus. It is the entire Christ or there is no Christ. It is the en-

tire journey of faith or there is no journey. You cannot get to the top of the mountain without struggling to climb the mountain as the disciples did in today's gospel. It cannot be done. You and I will never enter into the glory of the kingdom of God and in a resurrected form until we have suffered and died. And that is reality. That is the state of the human condition.

But because of Jesus who successfully completed the journey and entered into the glory of the resurrection we also are empowered by Him to successfully complete the journey and be empowered through the miracle of the resurrection. In other words, we are not lost through the mystery of the cross. None of us stop there. Just as it was for Jesus we are taken into the state of glory.

Beginning in our baptism we are called to live as Jesus lived but we don't follow this faith journey by ourselves. You are baptized into a church community. Back in the Old Testament when God brought the gift of His love and mercy to Israel He formed them into a people that He was going to save. He formed a nation that He was calling to salvation: the old covenant Israel. But in the New Testament there is the new covenant, Jesus who establishes His church as the new people, the new faithful who will walk together into the kingdom of God. Thus, out of our baptism as we recognize what Christ has given us powerfully in our own lives we recognize, hopefully, that we are to share the gift of redemption with those around us. That we are instruments of God one for each other: I help you in your journey of faith, you help me in my journey of faith

as together we are witness of the saving power of the gospel.

One of the primary ways that we do that in Catholic parishes throughout the United States, certainly, is through all the ministries that make up our faith community and there are so many here at Holy Family. The very purpose of the ministerial life of the Catholic Church is to empower people to recognize we do not walk our faith journey alone, that we assist one another on the journey into God and through our ministerial life, whatever that ministry is for you at Holy Family, you help those around you to be connected to Christ of the cross and Christ of the resurrection. You help to be united to the one Christ. You help your brothers and sisters to see that and to understand that, to be awakened to the reality of the cross as well as to be awakened to the reality of the resurrection. All of this happens in the ministerial life of our community.

Next weekend we will celebrate that reality as we will have our ministry fair in which we will celebrate all the ministries that comprise our Holy Family community. We will rejoice in all the men and women who are so active in these ministries. It also gives some of you an opportunity, if you are not active in a ministry at the moment, to see

where you might fit in. Where might God be calling you to serve in the ministerial life of this community so you can do your part to assist your brothers and sisters to be connected to the reality of Christ crucified and Christ risen.

For those of you who are new to our parish it is the ideal way to be connected to our parish family, to get involved, to be part of the ministerial life of the parish.

So, next weekend after all our Masses we will have our ministry fair of time and talent in our Family Life Center. You will see visibly present in the Family Life Center all the ministries that comprise this community. For those of you who are searching, looking for that ministry that you wish to be part of it is your opportunity to do so. So, I invite us in the spirit of Christ being transfigured today in Luke's gospel to allow the transfigured Lord to touch your heart and to draw you more deeply into ministerial life of this community as we live out and celebrate Christ crucified and Christ risen.

I invite us here today as Christ revealed His glorified body to Peter, James and John the words of Jesus "Come and follow me".