

2nd SUNDAY OF LENT – C (March 13, 2022)

Every year on the second Sunday of Lent we hear about Jesus' transfiguration, and on one level it always seems kind of strange. After all, Lent is about our need for ongoing conversion as well as remembering all that Jesus suffered on our behalf...and yet we read and hear about his appearance in radiant, divine glory. Sounds more like an Easter triumph story, doesn't it?

But in fact it does make sense; there is a connection. The transfiguration comes soon after Jesus had told the apostles that he would suffer and die and rise again, but they didn't comprehend what he told them. Peter went so far as to argue with Jesus and say "God forbid that should happen to you!" In this event itself, Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with the transfigured Jesus about 'his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem'—in other words, his suffering, death and resurrection. So there is indeed a strong link between Jesus' transfiguration and the Lenten season after all.

The transfiguration also demonstrated dramatically to Peter, James and John and us the fact of Jesus' divinity. His transfigured physical appearance had to be a shock to those three apostles: Jesus' "face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white"—hardly an everyday experience! Luke tells us that Peter, still reeling from this direct vision of Jesus' divinity, could only say: "it's good we are here; let's build tents for you, Moses and Elijah". Luke then adds that Peter "did not know what he was saying"; given what happened, we can't exactly blame Peter for that—can we??

So Jesus' transfiguration was and is a key moment in his earthly life—it confirmed his divine nature, his 'God-ness', joined to the human nature he received from his mother Mary. We can't emphasize enough this most important truth: our Savior is fully God and fully man in the one Person of Jesus of Nazareth. He is not half and half, not some halfway point between human and divine—he is fully and entirely both. This is the mystery of the Incarnation upon which the Christian faith is firmly and eternally built. Many today still try to claim Jesus was a good man or a wise teacher, but no more so than many other religious figures throughout history. The obvious problem, the fatal flaw of that claim: no one else was ever transfigured like Jesus, and no one else ever rose from the dead on his own power like Jesus—he is utterly and entirely unique.

But Jesus' transfiguration is even more than all that. It is also supremely relevant and important for us for what awaits us after our lives on this earth and into eternity. On one level, I almost hesitate to say it because it can sound so incredible and even outlandish, but it is part of our faith and so here goes: God made us to share in that transfigured glory of Jesus. Like I said: it sounds incredible. We will be like the transfigured Christ?? Luke tells us that Jesus' face changed in appearance; Matthew in his gospel goes further and says his face shone like the sun. I can assure you: the only way my face changes its appearance (other than shaving) is by the appearance of more and more gray hair and the occasional new wrinkle or two. Hardly my idea of 'transfigured glory', I assure you...

Yet...it's the truth. Remember that our bodies will be raised from the dead at the end of time—Jesus affirmed this without hesitation and with great clarity, and the Church has taught this from

her very beginning. I have no idea how this will happen, but I also know that nothing is impossible for God. St. Paul certainly affirms this as well in our second reading: “He [Jesus] will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body.” Our own bodies, that God will raise from the dead, will “conform with [Jesus’] glorified body”. Unbelievable? I might agree, except that the risen Christ appeared to Paul and Paul received detailed teaching from Peter and the other apostles who were taught by Jesus himself. It’s hard to imagine any stronger and more reliable authority than this—and thus gives us solid reasons to believe what would otherwise be utterly unbelievable.

What a glorious truth! What a wonderful consolation! Jesus desires this and makes it possible for every one of us. Think of those loved ones of yours who have died, whether recently or many years ago. Both my parents have been gone for over 30 years, and two of my three sisters have died as well. Not a day goes by that I don’t think of them, miss them, pray for their souls and ask them to pray for me. Of course we mourn their deaths...but keep in mind what Jesus is preparing for them and for all of us: sharing his eternal and transfigured glory with you and all our loved ones, and to do so together forever in the eternal family reunion that will be the heavenly kingdom.

We are obviously not there yet, but we are on the way—a way that began when we were baptized. The other sacraments, especially Eucharist and reconciliation/confession, continue that transforming and transfiguring process to make us more like Jesus. He is the one who does the work, but we need to desire and cooperate with his grace that makes that progress possible. Luke tells us about that Voice from the cloud: “This is my chosen Son; listen to him.” Indeed, we need to listen to Jesus, and Lent is an especially good time to shut off at least some of the noise that surrounds us—the TV, the phone, YouTube, and other such things—so we can better hear what he is trying to tell us. We need to follow Jesus’ lead instead of insisting on always following our own lead.

Listening to Jesus, following Jesus does and will transform and transfigure us ever more fully to his likeness in this life. Conversion is not just a one-time thing; it is a lifelong process for we are all works in progress, and we will be until the day we die. And it is precisely about leading us to share in the fullness of his transfigured glory forever. We can’t possibly imagine how utterly glorious and joyful that will be. But it is most certainly worth living for...and it is even more certainly worth dying for.