

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Mark 9:2-10

Our Scripture passage for this week comes from the Gospel of Mark 9:2- 10. This is the scene of Jesus' transfiguration and it is a fascinating revelation to the disciples of Jesus' inner identity and mission. This interesting event is contained in the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), as well as the Second Letter of Peter (2 Pt 1:16-18). This multiple attestation means that the Transfiguration was a significant event in the life of Jesus that is important for our lives of discipleship as well. For that reason this account was carefully preserved by the 1st Century Church. There are several points for our reflection.

The story of the Transfiguration tells us that Jesus was seen in the company of Elijah and Moses. There are several possible explanations that give reasons for the association of these two religious figures with Jesus. First, Moses and Elijah represent the Law and Prophets of the Old Testament. The moment of the Transfiguration demonstrates that Jesus (and the Gospel) is both in accord with and the fulfillment of the Old Testament writings. It is Jesus who gives the Law and Prophets their meaning. This is an important message because there were some people during the first years of Christianity who doubted the enduring value of the Old Testament and even considered it unnecessary to read the Old Testament-- Marcionism was a group who held this belief. This passage affirms the inherent value and enduring inspiration of the Old Testament while establishing its proper relationship to the Gospel and other New Testament writings: They are not in opposition to each other, but need to be understood in terms of "promise" and "fulfillment." With this understanding, it is important for Christians to read the Old Testament through the "lens " of Jesus Christ since He gives those writings their very meaning.

Second, Moses and Elijah are classic examples of divinely appointed people who suffered greatly for their fidelity to God's Word. Moses even prayed that God would take back the mission the Lord had entrusted to him! Certainly, fidelity to God's will can mean going against the world, and Jesus experienced suffering for His fidelity as well. Christian disciples are not exempt from such faithful suffering. Rather, Jesus has already instructed His disciples that they, too, must take up their cross and follow Him (Mk 8:34).

Third, Moses and Elijah are also people who were believed to have been saved from death and destruction and were believed to be "alive" in the presence of God. You might recall that Elijah was taken up into heaven in a fiery chariot at the end of his ministry (see 2 Kgs 2:11). Moses was popularly believed to have been assumed into heaven as well (see the inter-Testamental writing entitled, "The Assumption of Moses"). Thus, Jesus is standing with the two great leaders in the Old Testament who were saved from utter destruction and now live in God's presence.

Their experience of salvation is a preparatory sign of our Lord's resurrection. For all these reasons, Moses and Elijah are not only people of faith but they tell us a great deal about Jesus' life and mission.

1. *During this Time of Lent, how can you grow in your appreciation and understanding of the Old Testament?*
2. *Why is it important to know the Old Testament prophecies that are fulfilled in Jesus?*

3. *Who today is suffering because of their fidelity to God's will?*
4. *What stories of salvation (for example, being saved from utter destruction) give you courage to face adversity and overwhelmingly unfavorable odds?*

It is significant that Jesus goes up to a high mountain with His closest disciples for this moment of revelation and insight into His divine nature. It is also significant that God speaks from a cloud. In the Old Testament (and in other ancient cultures), mountains were places of communication between God and humanity. This was certainly true of Mount Sinai and the communication between God and Moses, as well as the Mount of the Jerusalem Temple. In pagan cultures, they also sought communication with the gods on mountains like Mount Olympus. The presence of a cloud had particular meaning for agrarian societies of the ancient world that depended upon rain for the success of their crops. Clouds bring rain and rain brings life. Since God is the God of Life, then a cloud is the perfect symbol for the divine presence as the Author of Life. We see the divine presence accompanied by a cloud in Exodus 40:34-38 when it covered the tent of a meeting. Also, in 1 Kings 8:10-11a a cloud filled the House of the Lord during the dedication of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. Psalm 68:4 states that the Lord "rides upon the clouds". All these texts affirm that the Transfiguration is a moment of revelation where the disciples are going to hear and recognize the voice of God and the presence of God in Jesus.

Such recognition may be easy in a moment of glory, but we need to remember that there will be another mountain Jesus will climb and that it will not be easy to recognize the voice of God and the Lord's presence on that mountain--it is the Mount of Calvary. As disciples, we may not go up to high places to meet the Lord, but we do have privileged places of encounter where we meet God more readily than in other settings. These privileged places of encounter may be the sacred space of a church, a prayer space in our homes, or other quiet area. We need to encounter the Lord wherever we can and whenever we can because for each of us there will be moments when it will be difficult to find that encounter or to recognize the presence and voice of God in the midst of a challenging or painful situation. The disciples needed to have this moment of revelation on the mountain of Transfiguration so they could remain strong when they faced the mountain of Calvary. We read this passage on the Second Sunday of Lent because we are praying for the grace to faithfully follow the Lord to Jerusalem and to accompany Him through His Death and Resurrection.

1. *What is your privileged place of encounter with God? Where do you go to meet the Lord?*
2. *When have you faced moments in which you needed to rely on a previous experience of God's grace because you could not recognize God's presence in the midst of your difficulty? The cloud passed away and the disciples eventually came down from the mountain. They never forgot that experience. What is an experience in which God has changed your life and given you lasting courage as a disciple?*

One of the final lessons this passage teaches us concerns the need for patience when we are trying to interpret what the Lord is saying to us. Peter demonstrates the opposite of

prayerful patience in this scene. Notice how we are told that, "Peter spoke up and said..." That verse is trying to emphasize Peter's preference to speak before he correctly understands. Peter is afraid and in his fear he is trying to interpret the moment for Jesus rather than letting Jesus interpret the moment for Peter! We see Peter's mistaken interpretation when he refers to Jesus with the title, "Rabbi". Jesus is much more than a Rabbi and Peter has to be corrected of his misunderstanding. Peter thinks that Moses and Elijah are the great ones and that Jesus is being honored by their presence; Peter has to learn that Jesus is the greatest one who gives honor and meaning to everything Elijah and Moses ever did. Peter also thinks that this moment of glory is the real destination of a life of faith and discipleship as opposed to the suffering, betrayal, and death that awaits Jesus in Jerusalem as already foretold by our Lord in Mark 8:31. That's why Peter wants to build three booths, staying there to prolong the experience rather than continuing. Peter is suffering from distorted faith because his fear has led him to incorrect and false conclusions in his quest to understand. The voice from the cloud is a public instruction by God the Father to clarify the true identity of Jesus the Son. This instruction informs Peter's misunderstanding and challenges him to "listen" when he is fearful rather than filling the silence. During this Second Sunday of Lent, we are invited to consider the ways in which we have allowed fear to lead us to false conclusions in our faith as well.

1. *Why do you think Peter was overwhelmed in that moment of revelation?*
2. *How does God get your attention when you are making a mistake?*
3. *How do people today try to answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" without listening to the revelation of God, and how can that process lead them to incorrect conclusions?*
4. *How much of your prayer is spent listening rather than talking?*
5. *Peter wanted to understand what was happening at the moment it was occurring, and his fear led him to erroneous conclusions. What fears cause trouble in your life as a disciple, and what habits or virtues can help you overcome those fears?*
6. *How has God interrupted your situation to reveal greater meaning and purpose in your life and help you see more clearly the presence of Jesus?*
7. *When we are in a fearful moment it can be tempting to grasp for certitude and security. For what security do you grasp when you are in a fearful situation?*