

## 2nd Sunday of Lent (A) – Homily by Fr. Peter Clark

Lent is a time of penance and self-denial. Our church and our homes are decorated in a more subdued way. We set aside much of the tasty food, clutter and glitz in our lives to allow the Lord to purge us of sin. We are preparing for the glory of the risen Christ on Easter.

So why does the church give us the striking Transfiguration of Jesus on a mountain top? The invited apostles, Peter, James and John, see Jesus with a shining face and dazzling clothes together with law-giver Moses and the prophet Elijah. Does that fit Lent?

Let's look at the context of this gospel reading. Recall how just before this Jesus asks his disciples, "*Who do people say that I am?*" From the day that Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Master "*began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things...and be killed, and on the third day be raised.*"

Peter scorns these predictions of Jesus, nor do the other disciples understand it any better than Peter. In this context the mysterious episode of Jesus' Transfiguration takes place on a high mountain before these special witnesses.

Not only do the face and clothes of Jesus become dazzling with light, but Moses and Elijah appear, speaking "*of his departure, which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem.*" A cloud covers him and a voice from heaven says, "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.*"

For just a moment, Jesus reveals his divine glory, confirming Peter's earlier confession (Christ, Son of God). Jesus is also saying a good deal about his "departure in Jerusalem" which he was discussing with Moses and Elijah.

Moses went through many tests and trials as a young man before his was chosen by God to lead Israel when the Lord delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Their departure or Exodus through the Red Sea was an act of faith amidst threats and hardships. It was Moses who led them for 40 years through the desert to prepare God's chosen people for the Promised Land.

Elijah is known as a heroic prophet confronting evil in Israel and calling people back to their purpose and destiny in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He had another journey, walking and fasting for 40 days to Mt. Sinai where he had an intimate experience with God which set the tone for the rest of his prophetic ministry until he was carried away by the fiery chariot.

As believers we have the advantage of looking back on the Transfiguration and seeing that Jesus was consulting Moses and Elijah in preparation for his departure, the way of the cross in Jerusalem. This Exodus, this sacrifice for us was foreseen in both the Law and the Prophets.

Jesus hoped that Peter, James and John might make the connection, that the devastation and sorrow of the crucifixion, was the new and final exodus or journey for all of us out of our slavery to sin and death. The Lord was giving them (and us) a foretaste of the glory of the Kingdom to those who would see him betrayed, scourged, tortured and then die a cruel death on the cross.

This would be Jesus entering his own glory of the passion for our benefit. Like Moses he would lead his people out of slavery to sin and death on a journey to a new and everlasting promised land. Like Elijah Jesus would heroically face evil and defeat it to lead all men and women to repentance and new life.

And so the Transfiguration is an encouragement and help to our journey of prayer, fasting, alms-giving and penance in Lent. Our efforts toward turning away from sin and repentance may have resulted in the same set-backs and discouragement Moses and Elijah experienced. We may be confused like Peter.

Jesus is saying, “I was the shepherd and inspiration for all the successful holy men and women of the past. Here is a glimpse, a taste of the glory of the victory I will win on the cross. Stick it out with me as you carry your own crosses and seek first the Kingdom of God for you and your family.”

The way of the cross leads to a resurrection. As we heard St. Paul tell us today, “*Bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God. He saved us and called us to a holy life...*”

So let us be encouraged today in our Lenten journeys. Today, Sunday we celebrate that resurrection. We are built up by God’s Word and the friendship of our brothers and sisters. We receive Jesus in the Eucharist to strengthen us on our way. God is good to us, even in our trials.