

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent (Year A) – March 12, 2017

GN 12:1-4A; PS 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22; 2 TM 1:8B-10; MT 17:1-9

Today's Gospel passage comes from **Matthew, Chapter 17:1-9**.

But, if you look up **Matthew 17, Verse 1** in the **Bible**, there are three words in **that complete verse** that do not appear in the passage used at **today's Mass**. Here's the first line of **today's Gospel Reading**:

*Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.* (Mt 17:1)

But the **complete verse** sounds like this—*listen for the three extra words*:

*After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.* (Mt 17:1)

The extra words are: **“After six days...”**

Which should raise the question in our minds:

### **What happened six days before the Transfiguration?**

**Here's what happened:** Jesus asked his disciples, **“Who do you say that I am?”** (cf. Mt 16:15). Peter correctly identified Jesus as **“the Messiah, the Son of the Living God”** (cf. 16). Jesus commended Peter for this **God-given insight**...but then...told the disciples that he—**Jesus**—**“must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised”** (cf. Mt. 16:21).

We recall **Peter's knee-jerk reaction**—when he tried to make Jesus abandon his self-sacrificial mission. Jesus told him, **“Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do”** (Mt. 16:23).

Shortly after putting Peter in his place, Jesus said to his larger group of followers:

**“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”** (Mt 16:24-25)

Finally, Jesus concluded his discourse with these words:

*Amen, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.* (Mt 16:28)

Which brings us to the **Transfiguration**, the *fulfillment* of these particular words of Jesus that *some of those standing there that day*—specifically, **Peter, James and John**—*did* actually see Jesus in the fullness of his glory...before the Resurrection!

Great for **them**!

But **what** does the **Transfiguration** have to do with *us*?

And *why* does this Gospel account of **Jesus' Transfigured glory** come to us at *this* particular time of the Liturgical Year—the **2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Lent**—when the **Feast of the Transfiguration** actually falls on **August 6**? Why this glimpse of glory *now*, when each one of us is—*hopefully*—fully immersed in the less glamorous Lenten practices of **prayer, fasting and almsgiving**?

To answer that question, let's take a look at how things unfolded in the lead-up to the Transfiguration. Jesus **confirmed** Peter when he correctly identified Jesus as the Messiah. **That's a positive thing!**

Then Jesus **broke the disturbing news** to his disciples that he would suffer a terrible death, but later rise from the dead. Naturally, this didn't fit the disciples' idea of what the Messiah should accomplish, and Peter—feeling overconfident from Jesus' previous praise—decided *to correct Jesus*. And Jesus **put Peter in his place!**

*Then* Jesus **taught** that following him **demand**s a great deal of sacrifice. He then revealed his **full glory**—to give his disciples something to recall later, in the midst of their struggles—to remind them of what awaits those who remain faithful. He wanted to reassure Peter, James and John with a display of his **authority**, his **power** and his **glory**, so that **when the suffering that inevitably comes to a faithful disciple came to them, they could take strength in the Truth of who Jesus is.**

Since the **Bible is the Living Word of God**, Jesus self-revelation as the **Son of God**—the **Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity**—our **Savior and Lord**—the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies of the victorious **Messiah**—is meant to encourage

**us...today...in 2017**, as we strive to follow Jesus faithfully amid the many obstacles to this mission—*the biggest obstacles being our own sinfulness and weakness*.

If we're **not** experiencing a conflict between our fallen, imperfect selves and the high standard of discipleship on a regular basis and, most especially, during **Lent**—in other words, **if our brand of Catholicism does not demand of us a daily battle against self and selfishness—then it's a good bet that we're not actually following Jesus**, but, rather, a “Messiah” of our own **liking**...a Savior of our own **making**. Most likely we're following the false “god” known as **self**.

The thing that Peter failed to see, once Jesus revealed his mission and the true cost of following him, was the *freedom of choice that Jesus exercised*. Jesus was so committed to his Father's will, that even the great personal price that would be demanded of him did not stop him.

Peter's mistake was thinking that all this was going to “**happen**” *to* Jesus. Jesus wanted Peter and the other Apostles understand that he—Jesus—was *choosing* this self-sacrifice out of love for his Father, and out of a burning desire to keep our souls out of Hell. Jesus described things this way in the **Gospel of John**:

*...the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father.”* (Jn 10:17-18)

Jesus was truly free—he could have chosen his own will over his Father's will—but he always kept his **focus** on his **Father**...and his **mind** on his **mission**.

Peter—just like you and me—was more concerned about **self-preservation** than *salvation*—because he didn't recognize the **true enemy**—*Satan*—and the **greatest threat**—*sin*. But before we too quickly condemn Peter for his short-sightedness, we must ask *ourselves* what Lent is for, and how *we're* approaching it.

**Lent is boot camp**—training to follow Jesus in the same self-sacrificial manner than he followed his Father—and not just for 40 days or so...but for the rest of our lives!

We may have approached Lent with great resolve to **become** the “**best version of ourselves**” instead of **allowing Jesus** make us into **Saints**. Like Peter, we may have been thinking “**like human beings do**”—treating Lent like a **New Year's Resolution**

rather than the path to holiness...and exercise in **willpower** instead of a surrender of **our** will to **God's** will.

The Transfiguration invites us to refocus on Jesus at *this early stage of Lent*—to ask ourselves about how our **prayer**, **fasting** and **almsgiving** are deepening our relationship with Jesus...or **not**!

So instead of **keeping a tally** of *how much more* we're **praying**...of *how much less* we're **eating**...and *how much money* we're parting with, let's "**think as God does...and not as human beings do**".

Let's ask ourselves what our **prayer**, **fasting** and **almsgiving** are revealing to us...*about ourselves*.

## **Prayer**

- Has my **prayer** made me *uncomfortable* because I can more clearly see the sin which infects my soul in the **Light of Christ**?
- Has my prayer freed me from comparing myself to others—*from telling myself I'm not so bad compared to "this person" or "that person"*—and instead moved me compare myself to *Jesus*?
- Has my prayer made me see how much I need to go to **Confession**?
- Have I actually even prayed **any more than normal** this Lent?

## **Fasting**

- Have I treated **fasting** as a **weight-loss program** that decreases my **waistline** even as it increases my **vanity**?
- Has my fasting exposed my **addiction** to certain kinds of **foods**, or revealed specific **eating habits** that keep me feeding my **stomach** instead of focusing on my **Savior**?

- Has my **voluntary** fasting made me more concerned for those who fast **involuntarily**—those whose hunger is not a **personal choice**, but a condition of **poverty**?
- Have I even fasted at all this Lent?

### Almsgiving

- Have I made any connection between the money I've saved by **fasting** and the people I can **feed** with that money?
- Have I considered any change to **my spending habits** during Lent—and **beyond Lent**—so that I can use the money God has given me for **someone** else?
- Am I **increasing** my financial support of my **parish**?
- Have I done anything for anyone else besides **myself**, my **family** and my **friends** with my **money** this Lent?

If we've **really** entered into this Lent—*denied ourselves, taken up our cross and followed Jesus*—then we have inevitably come **face-to-face with failure** at least once, if not **many** times. But if our failures help us recognize our **utter dependency on Jesus** more clearly, if we have realized that we are weak, sinful human beings in need of a Savior, then **even our “failures” are victories...so long as they turn us back to God!**

Jesus revealed the fullness of his glory in the **Transfiguration**, so that when his Apostles discovered what it **really** costs to follow him faithfully, they would take courage in **WHO JESUS REALLY IS**...turn away from **their weakness**...and toward **his strength**.

Jesus freely subordinated his own will to his Father's will.

**Lent is our chance to imitate Jesus**—freely choosing the **Father's will** over **our own**. But we do not need to keep trying to do this alone!

We can follow St. Paul's advice to Timothy in our 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading today: **[B]ear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God.** (2 Tim 1:8)