

HOMILY - TRANSFIGURATION - LENT SUNDAY 2-A

“To Glory Through The Cross”

(Genesis 12:1-4; Psalm 33; 2 Timothy 1:8b-10; Matthew 17:1-9)

A couple who had been married for 25 years were also celebrating their 60th birthdays. During the celebration a fairy appeared and said that because they had been such a loving couple all those years, she would give them one wish each. The wife wanted to travel around the world. The fairy waved her wand and boom! - She had the tickets in her hand. Next, it was the husband's turn. He paused for a moment, than said shyly, “Well, I’d like to have a wife 30 years younger than me.” The fairy obligingly waved her wand and boom! - He was 90!

The Glory of God is man and woman fully alive!

Follow Jesus through the Cross to Glory and Transformation

Our modern society is almost obsessed with the avoidance of pain. There is a very high use of drugs to avoid pain. Much medical knowledge is diverted from healing illness to trying to satisfy the frantic effort by so many to stay young and avoid pain. A telling definition of addiction that has surfaced recently states that addiction is basically the attempt to avoid legitimate suffering

The faith reality is that God does not give us a ladder to escape pain, but a drill to enter into it and use it to grow. Those who are in therapy will sometimes hear the saying that the only way through the pain is through the pain. There are some things, some lessons in life that we can learn only through suffering. Faith enables us to turn our suffering into redemptive suffering, suffering that has meaning.

The gospel account today of the transfiguration, is all about helping the apostles to face the coming passion of Jesus. It can also help us today cope with suffering in our lives. The context of the story is both Peter’s profession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah or Anointed One, and the first prediction of the Passion.

It is a gospel of many elements rich in symbolism and meaning. The six days represent a new creation. The three apostles who accompany Jesus are significant. Peter is the first pope; James the leader of the Jerusalem church, and John the last apostle to die – our last link with the apostolic church.

Pairing Moses and Elijah does not specifically symbolize the OT Scriptures as a whole (Law and Prophets) for neither are closely linked to written scriptures. Rather, Moses and Elijah were paired because they were both prophets who were initially rejected by the people but vindicated by God; both were advocates of the covenant and the Torah; both worked miracles, and both were considered by first-century Judaism to be transcendent figures who did not die but were taken directly to heaven. They thus represent the heavenly world of divine vindication, the world to which, from Matthew’s post-Easter perspective, Jesus also belongs. They are also talking to him about his passion, his own Passover which he would undergo in Jerusalem.

The mountain top of course makes this an important event, a theophany where one can expect to

meet God. Jesus is transfigured, a Greek word *metemorphothe* that means metamorphosed, changed, transformed, transfigured.

The voice of God breaks through as it did at his baptism, to bless him, confirm his identity and mission as it did then as Son of God, and command us to listen to him as Son of Man. That Jesus was alone at the end means that he is now the abiding presence of God with us. Without heavenly companions, without heavenly glory, he is the “tabernacle” (*skene*), the reality of God’s abiding presence with us. What follows is the second prediction of the passion. It is clear now that the way to glory and transformation is the Cross, the road of redemptive suffering.

This mystery of the Cross as a blessing, and as a way to glory and transformation, is being lived out now by our family. My oldest brother Louis underwent an operation three years ago to remove a brain tumor that proved to be an aggressive cancer. Their struggle as a couple to deal with this devastating reality in their lives has been a tremendous challenge.

Though often tempted to give up, both are sustained by their faith, the expertise of the medical profession, and the support of family, relatives and many friends. The illness has radically altered their lives, and given them much more time with their children and grandchildren than would have ever happened had there been no illness. They have discovered what truly matters in life; all superficial distractions have been stripped away. What is important to them now is their relationship with a loving God in prayer, and their relationship with each other, their family, friends and relatives. In a very real sense, this cross in their lives has also brought profound blessings.

Our Lenten practices and liturgies are given to us to help us who are not carrying such a radical cross, to also go deeper and re-discover for ourselves the true meaning of life in the busyness of our days. Hopefully it will not take a devastating disease to help us establish priorities in our lives.

The Eucharist we celebrate now makes present for us the supreme act of Jesus’ love for us shown on the Cross. Our communion empowers us to live out the cross in our own lives, and arrive at glory through the cross.

So let us listen to the Father’s voice, and follow Jesus through the Cross to Glory and Transformation.