

HOMILY LENT SUNDAY 02-C

“The Transfiguration of Jesus”

(Deuteronomy 26:4-10; Psalm 91; Romans 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13)

Have you ever had a mountain-top experience? Do you want to know the way to have one?

Follow Jesus through the Cross to Glory.

Everybody wants to feel happy, to have that high, mountain-top feeling. Unfortunately, many don't know how and choose a false way. Lacking faith, they fall for the temptations that we saw last Sunday (possessions; prestige and power) and get lost in a self-centered world of abusing alcohol, drugs like Crystal Meth or Methadone, sex, gambling, gossiping, shopping, etc. and end up addicted.

The philosopher Henri Thoreau, reflecting on this sad reality, once stated that “Most people lead lives of quiet desperation.” An example of someone like this in the news recently is Britney Spears who has been displaying a shocking amount of bizarre behaviour, including shearing off her hair on an impulse, and at least twice running away from rehabilitation centres the day she checked herself in. The poor girl has money, fame and power, but can't seem to handle it. She seems to be desperately searching for some measure of happiness and peace without being able to find it.

There is another way, the way of the Cross. I was privileged to share in a faith-based mountain top experience just the other day right at home in The Pas. A parishioner, Orest Pidskalny is struggling with cancer in the hospital across the street from the Cathedral. He shared with the rector, Fr. Paul Bringleston, that he would love to have lobster instead of hospital food. Secretly, Fr. Paul went out, bought some lobster, cooked up a lobster feast complete with fondue, and packed it into a picnic container. He invited me to go along with him to the hospital where we surprised Orest with a meal of lobster and garlic butter fondue on his hospital tray. He not only thoroughly enjoyed it, but was moved to tears by this gesture. The hug he and his wife Theresa gave us as we left was full of emotion, affection and gratitude. And I, along with Fr. Paul, felt deep joy that could only come from this kind of love and caring for someone else. This was truly a mountain-top experience, one I would wish for the whole world, certainly all the Britney Spears of the world.

What Fr. Paul did was live the gospel of this second Sunday of Lent. He picked up the Cross of sacrificing some money, effort and time to care for someone else, and experienced the Glory, the peace and joy of Jesus, as a result. And like the apostles in the gospel, I was invited along to witness and share in that experience.

Jesus came to show us a better way, the only true way to real meaning and happiness – the Cross – the faith-filled acceptance of some redemptive suffering out of love.

The purpose of the transfiguration was partly to strengthen the faith of the apostles in Christ as the Suffering Servant; to prepare them for the scandal of the cross; to show that redemptive suffering is the best way to new life, and that transformation is the goal of Christian life. But it was even deeper than that. Hans Urs von Balthasar adds that the transfiguration of Jesus is not just an anticipation of the Resurrection (when Jesus' body is transformed toward God), but also the presence of the Triune God and all of salvation history in his body, which is destined for the Cross. In his transfigured body, the covenant between God and humanity is sealed with finality.

The readings for today provide a meaningful context for the gospel event. The Old Testament reading speaks of a covenant between God and Abram, based on his faith in God, and sealed by a sacrifice of blood and fire or Spirit. The second reading encourages us to stand firm in the Lord, to place our faith in the Cross of Jesus Christ, and we will experience the transformation of our own bodies as well.

The gospel passage from Luke is significantly placed between Peter's profession of faith that is coupled with the first prediction of the passion and command to take up cross, and the second prediction of the passion. All this underlines the message – follow Jesus through the Cross to Glory.

Though it is impossible to comment on everything that is in this striking gospel passage, allow me a brief overview. First, the three apostles underline the importance of this event: Peter, the first leader; James, the head of the Jerusalem Church, and John, the last apostle to die. These three all experience other key moments in the life of Jesus, including his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane.

The mountain means that this is a Theophany, a meeting with God. Moses, the great Lawgiver, and Elijah, the great Prophet, along with the apostles, make five witnesses, underlining again the importance of this event. Their presence also highlights Jesus as THE prophet and THE new Law. In the midst of this glory, they are speaking to Jesus about his passing in Jerusalem, encouraging us to follow Jesus through the Cross to glory. The cloud makes this a New Exodus, reminding us that God works in darkness and through the mystery of suffering in our lives.

The sleepiness of Abram and the apostles in the readings here as well as in the Garden of Gethsemane, speaks of liminal space, a time of transition, of transformation, of new creation. The voice from the cloud, like at the baptism of Jesus, is the Father blessing Jesus. Everything points to Jesus - we must follow him.

The three tents Peter wants to build is a normal human reaction. He wants to freeze this moment, to hang on to the high. Is that not the situation of most of humanity? Like Peter, who did not yet understand the message of the Cross, we want to stay high all the time, and avoid the pain of life. As the big book of AA puts it, we seek a softer, easier way. And so, like the Britney Spears of this world, we so often chase after a vague happiness that always seems to elude us. And yet, it is there for us, if we but have faith, and follow

Jesus through the Cross to his glory. He redeemed us through the Cross, and now he transforms us when we put our faith in him, take up our cross and follow him.

The cross can be any pain, suffering or inconvenience for the sake of others that we would rather avoid. Our cross could be caring for an aged parent; criticism that comes our way; the challenge of chastity; an alcoholic spouse or rebellious child; taking time for kids and spouse, an illness or plans that didn't work out, going through rehabilitation or working the 12 Steps. A concise way to describe the Cross is that there is no gain without pain.

All this in a modern society that is afraid of pain, doesn't understand suffering, and tries to eliminate inconvenience of any kind. The pressure from society to use the advances of science (drugs, abortion, pre-natal testing, euthanasia, etc.) for the selfish purpose of avoiding pain and inconvenience is increasing all the time. Conversely, so is the need to proclaim the counter-cultural message of Jesus – that the only way to true happiness and even joy, is the faith-filled acceptance of redemptive suffering for others in our lives – the way of the Cross.

Recently I had to return to the community of Cormorant to retrieve something I forgot there the previous night after the Ash Wednesday celebration. I was in a hurry to go to the cabin for my monthly retreat. Upon arriving, I found that three ladies had gathered at the Church to sing and pray – they wanted to do something special because it was Lent. They wanted me to stay for a while and sing with them. Reluctantly, I put aside my schedule and did so. We sang our hearts out for an hour, in Cree and English, and lo and behold, I again experienced that joy that comes from sacrificing for the sake of another. I had followed Jesus through the Cross to Glory. The glory this time was the same joy I had experienced earlier that day at the hospital meal with Orest. It is true – the way to glory is through the Cross of Jesus Christ, in whatever form it comes to us. That day, it happened to come to me twice!

The Eucharist that we share today is a foretaste of heaven, a mini-transfiguration. It makes present the love of the one who truly lived the cross to the full in his life, Jesus, who invites us to follow him, be like him.

So remember, the way to glory is through the cross. Trust in Jesus. See the cross as a blessing. Pray for the faith to accept it, carry it and share it in our lives, and we will find joy.