

2nd Sunday of Lent Year “C”

March 16-17, 2019

Readings: Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18; Phil 3:17-4:1; Luke 9: 28-36

The Church is blessed to have the benefit of not one, but of four Gospels. Certainly, one account could have been sufficient to relate the most important aspects of the ministry of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, from our own experience we know that having more than one set of eyes only increases the degree to which we comprehend something.

If you have ever seen a movie a second time, invariably you notice something that somehow slipped by on the first viewing. Similarly, a colleague at a lecture or conference may well interpret the same exact presentation differently than you, resulting in a lively discussion afterwards.

We are blessed to have three accounts of the Transfiguration—from the gospels of Sts. Matthew, Mark and Luke. The essentials of the account are the same, but there are some unique differences worth noting, each of which may highlight particular emphases under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit.

The account of the Transfiguration occurs right after the account of Jesus exhorting his disciples to take up their crosses and follow him. We are told that a condition for discipleship is the willingness to deny our very selves and take up our cross. St. Luke adds the word ‘daily’ to that mix.

More significantly, earlier in the ninth chapter of St. Luke, we have the account of Herod asking, “Who then is this about whom I hear such things?” Some had been saying that this ‘prophet’ was Elijah or John the Baptist raised from the dead. The story of the Transfiguration seeks to answer this question and more—“This is my beloved Son, my chosen.” St. Luke is the only one to use the word ‘chosen.’

This phrase “chosen one” has a rich history and conveys something much deeper. It harkens back to Isaiah 42, one of four Servant of the Lord poems seen by Christians as referring to Jesus. “Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased.” Jesus is not just Moses or Elijah returned, but God’s very chosen One. The Messiah, Jesus, is God’s very chosen one; therefore, we must listen to him.

To listen to Jesus is to listen to the Father, clearly implying that Jesus now speaks with greater authority than Moses or Elijah, who represented the Law and the Prophets. Notice that in these accounts, Moses and Elijah depart. That same phrase will reappear again at the crucifixion– this Chosen One will be taunted by the crowd: “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, the chosen one.” (Luke 23:35)

Peter was fully prepared to make three booths, a reference to the Jewish feast of Tabernacles or Booths, a harvest festival that included the building of temporary booths to recall symbolically the years of wandering in the desert. But Peter misunderstood the nature of this vision.

Luke alone adds “As they were about to part from him,” highlighting the dual exit of Moses and Elijah. They retreat into the background. Instead of holding on to the figures of old, the heavenly voice charges the disciples to listen to Jesus. Far from a denigration of the vital role of the prophets, it is another sign that what we witness here is a new covenant.

There is one other key line worth mentioning in this account. Being a fuller account, St. Luke includes the very human element of Peter, James and John being heavy with sleep (sound familiar—the Garden of Gethsemane). The other evangelists did not mention this detail, perhaps even a bit embarrassing to the apostles.

When they awake only St. Luke uses the word ‘glory’ as he describes what they saw. “Becoming fully awake, they saw his glory.” This single detail

has been put forth as perhaps the major motivating factor of the story. One can awake to experience the glory of Christ only if one awakes to share in his humiliation and death.

Remember, the disciples had just previously been told of the heavy cost of discipleship. Could this have been a reward for those who remained with him? Undoubtedly, a week or so before, some who heard the teaching of Jesus decided they were not ready for this kind of a commitment. “Take up my cross daily,” they thought? Not I. However, for those who respond, “Yes,” this was a glimpse of what lay ahead in the future.

For us today, there is a great lesson in the Transfiguration. Situated on the Second Sunday of Lent, the story serves as a reminder of the sufferings he will endure before the glory of his resurrection. We share in the glory of Christ by sharing in both his humiliation and triumph through our works of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

If by now, you are starting to notice how difficult it is to persevere in your mortifications of Lent, take heart. Take courage. What ultimately remain ahead for each of us are glory and triumph, not death and destruction.

The Gospel of the Transfiguration, in all three of its versions, is rich fare for our Lenten meditation. Let us take to heart its lessons and its promises.