

2nd Sunday Lent Year "C"

February 23-24, 2013

*This is my chosen Son; listen to Him.*

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

In the Church's wisdom this weekend, we are given the account of the Transfiguration just as we enter into the arduous spiritual work of Lent for at least another month. Last week we were reminded of the power of temptation, and this week we are given a glimpse into the glory that awaits God's faithful in the glory of heaven. Perhaps the Church is reminding us that our sacrifices will be worth it; they do count for something. But our journey of faith is not at all clear.

Abram experienced the darkness of obscurity as he listened to the Lord's invitation. "Look and count the stars as you can...so shall your descendents be." Abram was given a glimpse in the midst of his darkness, and God made a covenant that day, and it has never been revoked. In our opening prayer we ask the Lord, "to nourish us inwardly by your word, that, with spiritual sight made pure, we may rejoice to behold your glory." The way is set out for us, but the darkness of sin can obscure it. Our Holy Father once remarked:

*Human existence is a journey of faith and, as such, goes forward more in darkness than in full light, with moments of obscurity and even profound darkness. While we are here, our relationship with God develops more with listening than with seeing...<sup>1</sup>*

In that moment of transfiguration, the Father was indeed present in the Son, and in that brightness of the Lord, the nature of God was not separated from His only-begotten Son. We are told that: "while he was speaking a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened..." It is understandable that the disciples became frightened, for they had not seen anything like this before. But could their fear also represent something deeper?

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Angelus* address 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent, March 12, 2006

Sometimes we are afraid of what we do not know, but at other times we are afraid precisely of what we **do** know. Could it be that the disciples were fearful because of the realization of just who this Jesus truly was? That is, if we knew in whose presence we were standing, would the realization be too much for us? Jesus' divinity shone forth, the very power of God manifest visibly. It is a powerful experience to know the love of the lord in our hearts, but the thought of underestimating the power of that love only heightens our sense of loss if we turn away from it.

St. Jerome speculated in a homily as to the reasons for their fear; "either because they knew they had erred in the past, or because the bright cloud covered them, or because they heard the voice of God the Father speaking."<sup>2</sup> He surmised that human frailty could not endure the sight of such great glory. Perhaps this is true, and yet we need the glimpses! And perhaps Jesus knew that he needed witnesses. That is, "it must be revealed who it is who is thus going into darkness on behalf of all of us; it must be made plain from what heights he comes to descend into such depths for us."<sup>3</sup>

Overshadowed by a cloud, we may feel as though we are being swallowed up by fear. We cannot handle being overshadowed by suffering, uncertainty or doubt. What happens if the clouds do not break, where are we to go if the darkness perdures? Fear paralyzes us, and it casts out love. Without peace, we will not love fully.

I do not think it an exaggeration to say that for many people, the impending resignation of the Holy Father is one such moment, a moment in which we are tempted to begin to feel as though we are sinking, that we are listing in the midst of the bark of St. Peter.

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<sup>2</sup> The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers, vol. 2 page 43.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, "You Crown the Year with Your Goodness; Sermons Through the Liturgical Year, Ignatius Press, 1989: p. 58-59

There may even be some sense of abandonment, wondering what this all means for the Church. Pope Benedict XVI knows these sentiments exist. Just today at the end of his *Angelus* he said:

But this does not mean abandoning the Church, indeed, if God is asking me to do this it is so that I can continue to serve the Church with the same dedication and the same love with which I have done thus far, but in a way that is better suited to my age and my strength.<sup>4</sup>

We must remember, that while neither unprecedented nor unforeseen as a possibility in Church Law, this course of events is most unusual and raises the specter of many questions. That it comes during Lent only heightens the sense in which it is a collective call to examine our consciences, to pray to the Lord to continue to guide and where necessary, to purify the Church.

I encourage your fervent prayers in the days ahead. In particular, if possible, try to pause this coming Thursday at 1:00 p.m., for at that moment, our beloved Holy Father will officially conclude his ministry as the Successor of St. Peter. His name will be mentioned during the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass in the morning, but not in the afternoon. Following that, preparations will begin for the papal conclave. Let us pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, upon the College of Cardinals and more importantly for the Church, the pilgrim People of God. In fact, we are never left orphaned.

This is why Jesus gives us glimpses of himself more profoundly, lest we fall under the weight of uncertainty. The transfiguration happened in order to strengthen the faith of the disciples, to give them a sense of hope. We too need this hope, even as we try to more faithfully embrace the Cross all throughout this season of Lent. For now, we simply thank the Lord for the glimpse of glory, and trust his promises that there is so much more to come.

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Angelus* Address, 24 February 2013.