

2nd Sunday of Lent - B
Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18;
Romans 8:31b-34;
Mark 2:9-10
Little Flower - 2/25/18

My Brothers and Sisters,

Every year on the Second Sunday of Lent, the Church proclaims the Gospel of the Transfiguration of Jesus.

The transfiguration is one of three times in the New Testament when we hear the voice of God the Father: *“This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.”* With these words, God the Father validates Jesus as his own beloved Son. Therefore, just as it did for Peter, James, and John, Jesus’ transfiguration should strengthen our faith in Jesus as the Son of God, who was both fully human and fully divine. At the same time, the presence of Moses and Elijah, representing the Old Testament Law and the Prophets, validated Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament and, therefore, as the Messiah or Savior.

The Transfiguration also helped to prepare the disciples for Jesus’ impending suffering and death. Because the disciples had given up everything to follow Jesus, we can only imagine how shattering his suffering and death would be to them. The transfiguration planted the seed of hope in them by giving them a glimpse of his future glory.

Just as their faith would be tested, the first reading tells the story of God testing Abraham’s faith by asking him to sacrifice his son Isaac. This would have been a tremendous test of faith for any parent, but it was even more so for Abraham. Abraham and Sarah had been unable to have children, but God gave them Isaac when both Abraham and Sarah were very elderly. Also, God had promised to make Abraham a great nation with descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sands on the seashore through Isaac. After all that, God was asking Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac.

Like Abraham and Jesus’ disciples, our faith is often tested although not so dramatically. When we are confronted with sickness or death whether our own or in our families or among our loved ones, when we are confronted with terrible evil in our country or in our world, when we face all kinds of challenges in our families or our careers, our faith is tested. The transfiguration and ultimately Jesus’ resurrection give us hope. As Paul wrote to the Romans, *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* One of the most important articles of our faith is our belief not only in life after death but also in the resurrection of the body. In the Apostles’ Creed, which is older than the Nicene Creed, we profess, “I believe in the resurrection of the body.”

My brothers and sisters, in this “already, but not yet” time in which we live, we can already participate in Jesus’ risen and glorified life. Lent challenges us to grow into the likeness of the risen Christ. To use Matthew Kelly’s language, Lent challenges us to become the-best-version-of-ourselves. According to Matthew Kelly, to become the-best-version-of-ourselves is to become holy.

The root of the word *holy* is the same as the root of the word *whole*. Therefore, Joseph Goldbrunner wrote a little book titled *Holiness is Wholeness*. If the primary effect of sin is alienation from God, others, the world, and ourselves, wholeness or holiness is living in right relationships with God, others, the world, and ourselves. When we live in right relationships, we become the-best-version-of-ourselves and grow into the likeness of the Risen Christ.

This, however, is the task of a lifetime, not one Lent. In *Best Lent Ever* for February 17, Matthew Kelly spoke of “The Power of Progress.” In his reflection, he made the point that we become the-best-version-of-ourselves by becoming a-better-version-of-ourselves every day. Our goal and challenge this Lent are progress not perfection. As he said, “we’re imperfect beings striving for perfection, and we have to learn to celebrate our progress.”