

2nd Sunday of Lent - B
Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18;
Romans 8:31b-34;
Mark 9:2-10
Little Flower - 2/28/21

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Second Sunday of Lent. On the Second Sunday of Lent, the Gospel always tells the story of Jesus' transfiguration.

Jesus' transfiguration was an important event in Jesus' life. As the Preface will remind us, the transfiguration helped prepare Peter, James, and John, for the scandal of Jesus' impending passion, death, and resurrection. In Mark's Gospel, it comes between Jesus' first and second prophecies of his passion. We are even told that it occurred six days after Jesus' first prophecy of his passion when Peter was so scandalized that he argued with Jesus. It is important for us to remember that the apostles had left everything to follow Jesus. They had entrusted their lives and futures to him. With his transfiguration, Jesus wanted to prepare them for his passion and death by giving them a glimpse of the glory of the resurrection.

During the transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus. Moses and Elijah represented the Old Testament Law and the Prophets. Their appearance with Jesus demonstrated to the apostles that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament Law and the Prophets and, therefore, the Christ or Messiah. Finally, the voice of God the Father comes from the cloud: "*This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.*" God the Father validates Jesus' identity as his Son. In this one dramatic moment, in anticipation of his passion, death, and resurrection, both Jesus' identity and his mission were revealed to the apostles and to us.

Western and Eastern Christianity have different perspectives on salvation. Western Christianity focuses on our redemption from sin. This focus is evident in Jesus' temptations in the desert in last Sunday's Gospel. Although Jesus resisted the devil's temptations, Jesus was subject to temptation because he was human, and temptations always appeal to human weakness. In the final analysis, every temptation is a temptation to try to be more or less than human.

On the other hand, Eastern Christianity focuses on divinization, i.e., on our becoming God-like. As St. Irenaeus wrote, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, through His transcendent love, became what we are that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself. In other words, the Son of God became human that he might make us, who are human, to be sons and daughters of God. Just as Jesus was transformed, transfigured, on the mountain, we are called to be transformed, transfigured, into the likeness of the Risen Christ.

This is what Matthew Kelly means when he challenges us to become the-best-version-of-ourselves. In one of his books, he recounts that as a young speaker he tried to talk about the call to holiness, but people's eyes would glaze over when he spoke about holiness. To become the-best-version-of-ourselves is his definition of holiness. Becoming holy is an ongoing process of striving every day to become a better-version-of-ourselves. At the Transfiguration, Jesus gave the disciples a glimpse of the-best-version-of-himself, Christ in glory, which also foreshadows the best version of ourselves.

As Josef Goldbrunner wrote, holiness is wholeness. Wholeness is living in right relationships with God, others, the world, and ourselves. In today's first reading, Abraham was holy because he was willing to do God's will no matter the cost, even to the point of sacrificing his son. In the Old Testament, God said, "*Be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy*" [Lev. 19:2]. In the Gospels, Jesus specified this by challenging us: "*So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect*" [Mt. 5:48] and "*Be merciful, just as (also) your Father is merciful*" [Lk. 6:36]. We become holy when we strive to become the-best-version-of-ourselves and when we are generous and forgiving toward others.

My brothers and sisters, today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans should fill us with hope in these difficult times. As Paul said, "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*" and if God "*did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?*"