

My Brothers and Sisters,

Just as the Gospel on the First Sunday of Lent is always the story of Jesus' forty-day fast in the desert and his temptations by the devil, the Gospel on the Second Sunday of Lent is always the story of his Transfiguration. Jesus' Transfiguration gave the apostles James and John a glimpse of Jesus' future glory. The appearance of Moses and Elijah with Jesus revealed Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Law and the Prophets. In Luke's Gospel, the Transfiguration occurred eight days after Jesus' first prophecy of his passion, death, and resurrection. Shortly after the Transfiguration, Jesus prophesied his passion, death, and resurrection a second time. Also, there is an ancient tradition that the Transfiguration took place 40 days before his death. The Transfiguration, then, helped prepare the disciples for Jesus' passion and death.

In last Sunday's homily, I focused on expectations. Today's three readings focus on promises and possibilities.

The Old Testament is the story of the covenant between God and Israel on Mount Sinai. However, prior to the Old Testament covenant, there were a number of quasi-covenants based on God's promises. In today's reading from Genesis, God promised Abram that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. God also told Abram that he had brought him from Ur of the Chaldeans to give him the land as his possession. When Abram asked how he would know that he would possess the land, God made a covenant with Abram, promising *"To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River, the Euphrates."*

What are we promised in the New Covenant? At the Last Supper, Jesus *"took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins'"* [Mt. 26:27-28]. In other words, Jesus came to reconcile us with God, others, the world, and ourselves, i.e., to give us fulness of life. Life in all its fulness—that is the promise.

The possibilities are found both in the second reading and the Gospel. St. Paul wrote that Jesus, the Savior, will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body. We are called to grow into the likeness of the risen Christ, which is the-best-version-of-ourselves. Life in all its fulness—that is the promise and the possibility.

Jesus' transfiguration is linked to his first two predictions of his passion, death, and resurrection. After Jesus' first prophecy of his passion, death, and resurrection, he said, *"If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."* We take up our crosses daily by dealing positively with what life deals us and by striving to put to death the selfishness and sin that is part of our lives.

Second, one of the best ways to become the-best-version-of-ourselves is to model our lives on the best people we know, sometimes called paradigmatic individuals. For Christians, Jesus is our paradigmatic individual. As Christians, we will only be the best people we can be if we imitate Christ, i.e., if we model our lives on his teachings and example. Therefore, our challenge is to make our own and live the values he taught and lived.

My brothers and sisters, Jesus, however, is not the only model for our lives. In today's second reading, Paul wrote, *"Join with others in being imitators of me, ..., and observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us."* Unfortunately, the people we often choose to imitate are not chosen because of their goodness or holiness, but because they are rich, famous, successful, an athlete, or a film, TV, or rock star. Almost all of us know some good and holy people, either family members or others, living or deceased, whom we know we should strive to imitate. Let us choose to imitate the very best, the most Christian, the most Christ-like people we know. As Christians, saints, both living and deceased, canonized or not, should be our heroes.