

Today's gospel account tells us about something that the disciples must have had a hard time believing what they were seeing, that while Jesus was praying the appearance of his face changed. The gospels of Mark and Matthew say he was transfigured! We call this day in our church calendar the Transfiguration because of what happened.

Transfiguration is an interesting word, it comes from Latin and old French. The "Trans" part means to change by moving across from one place or state to another, and the "Figure" part comes from the word for face or appearance.

In Luke's gospel, the original Greek words reflect the perception of his face, or the appearance of his face changing, but in Mark and Matthew's gospel the Greek word is *Metamorphothe*, like metamorphosis, a change in the outward appearance without actually changing the essence of the person or thing that is transfiguring.

We use metamorphosis most often when we describe what happens to a caterpillar when it becomes a butterfly. It is the same creature but its appearance has changed into something beautiful and special.

When Jesus was transfigured in front of the disciples, he didn't change into someone different, he was the same Jesus, but what happened was that he allowed his disciples to see him as he really was and would be in his glory so that they would finally understand he was so much more than their simple earthly eyes could normally see.

As hard as it was to believe, the vision they saw was proof for them of the truth of what Jesus had been saying to them, that he came from the Father, he was one with God, and that we would reach our salvation and that same glory if we followed him.

Saint John Paul the second, who was our Holy Father on earth, understood the importance of this vision and named the Transfiguration one of the luminous mysteries of the rosary because it shows us the true goal of our very existence. Jesus shows us and promises us that this is what we are made for, to be transfigured in our mortal bodies in heaven with him, just as he was on earth.

In this season of Lent, when we are called to sacrifice for our own good, we can ask ourselves, "Are we not called to be ready to make any sacrifice required to achieve this wonderful goal, given to us freely out of love by the Father through the action of his Son?"

It's a little sad to think that although the apostles were very impressed by what they saw, what would we in the modern world believe if we saw something like that today.

Imagine seeing a person you have walked and talked with suddenly transfigured into a glowing radiant being in front of us. We would probably look around and try to find the special effects projector or the holograph machine. We have been so swamped with spectacular images conjured up by Hollywood to entertain us that we would have a hard time believing that something spiritual was taking place.

So we are left with the question of how we become transfigured into what we really are, what God really made us, so that the light of Christ shines out from us for others to see?

That isn't as far-fetched as it may sound. How many times have you heard someone describe the person who rescued them from a disaster as an angel, because they seemed to be glowing with light.

Was it an angel, or was it just someone who for a moment was acting and sacrificing as Christ would act, and so was seen by the person they were helping with the eyes of Peter and James and John when they looked at Jesus on the mountain? Seeing one of ourselves as we are truly meant to be.

In the end, that is what we are meant to be, a people transfigured by the love of Christ within us that we share with those around us.

We won't become glowing earthly angels by our own power but when we accept the love of Christ and reach out to others in trouble and need as he did, then we will be spiritually transfigured and we will change into something beautiful just as surely as the caterpillar becomes the butterfly.

But we are a sinful and selfish people and the Lord and his Church know that it is hard for us to put aside our worldly way of life and so we have times like Lent to help us practice. Lent gives us a focus to remember to sacrifice and pray, just as Jesus did in the desert before he began his great work.

If we are to begin the great work of becoming that person God means us to be, then it is good for us to begin as Jesus did.

Jesus fasted to show we can do without so much so that others may have a little. Jesus prayed so that the power of God would be with him in his trials. And finally, when tempted, Jesus rejected the wealth of the world offered by the devil because he knew how easily our possessions can come to possess us instead.

So during Lent we can fast in a way that our hunger reminds us what is really important. We can find the extra time to pray that we don't normally have in our life to make sure we are connected to God. We can step aside from our wealth by sharing what we have in a meaningful way through our diocesan ShareLife campaign.

These steps will prepare our hearts and spirits for the transfiguration we are called to undergo.

When we think of the wonderful result of these changes and the goal we may achieve, then we can take on these hardships joyfully. This is important, as Jesus reminds us in the gospel on Ash Wednesday when he says, "Don't be like the hypocrites who disfigure their faces to show the world they are suffering."

We are called to transfigure our faces as Jesus did, not to disfigure our faces as the Pharisees did.

As Father Stephenson used to say over at St. Christopher's, "If you believe Jesus loves you and that fills you with joy, then please inform your face!" Just because it's Lent doesn't mean we have to be frowning and serious looking all the time, it's serious business but we can do it joyfully!

How can we tackle this challenge to become transfigured Christians? Well, you've taken the right first step by coming to the mass and our next step is to come forward and receive Jesus in the Eucharist so that he is living inside of us physically where we can use his love for us to give us the strength to spread that love to others we see.

The world is watching how we behave as disciples of Christ, and they need to see the way that following him can change our lives.

They need to see that when we act as he acted and love one another, even our enemies, as he did, that we are indeed transfigured before their eyes into something they might not believe could actually happen.