

Homily St Pius–St Anthony 2nd Sunday Lent Year B

What is a transfiguration? Mark 9:2-3 says “he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller (one who cleansed the wool) on earth could bleach them.” Some kind of brilliant light show happened. I guess, Jesus revealed his divinity as a type of ‘blinding’ display of luminosity to Peter, James & John. It’s must have been the splendid radiance a person can’t help but to step back from because of its glare or illuminative shock (maybe like the dangerous flash of ‘welding’ -don’t look at it- or a direct stare at the sun-don’t do it, or I recall the first time I had my eyes dilated for an exam after an injury. Leaving, they handed me these black covers, like 3D movie glasses. I thought “What are these for?”, but I learned quickly when I stepped out into the parking lot. Yes, please dim those lights!

I’m sure we all had a little experience of that in the recent snow, when the sun finally came out (snow still on ground). And as you walked outside first thing, you may have had to shield your eyes because the reflection off snow was blinding. I think of the radiant display of Jesus’ divinity that way. All his glory shining! It just overwhelmed Peter James and John; that is why Peter says crazy things to Jesus. It’s too much to take in. One needs a filter or UV guard. Since we are talking about Moses, it is instructive to recall a time in his life, too, after he had been conversing with God 40 days on the mountainside, and his face appearance changed so much that when he went down to give word to Israelites about what God declared in his ‘summit’ with God, Exodus 34:28-29, 35 ***“Then the Israelites would see that the skin of Moses’ face was radiant; so he would again put the veil over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD.”*** And another similarity to Jesus’ transfiguration – and of being in the direct presence of God as an experience of it being illuminatingly overwhelming-too much light -I’d say that’s what happens when Saul becomes Paul in his encounter with Christ on road to Damascus in Acts 9:3-8. Paul is knocked to ground by blinding light. Too much to take in. But such experiences of divine light do change one’s outlook completely. They reframe our vision, reset our horizons, & reveal what we never saw before. Peter James and John had been with Jesus for some time yet never did they imagine what divinity shining through humanity in Christ could be like? Their overwhelmed reaction proves this. So why do we have this reading the second Sunday of Lent? To put before us what change is possible in us through union with Christ by our Lenten work deepening our bond with him, with our customary actions of adding more prayer to our lives, sacrifice and charity acts.

Some people describe this transfiguration encounter between Peter James and John with Jesus as a ***‘Peak Experience’***. One of those (maybe rare) experiences that bring about a complete reorientation in our outlook- maybe something like a ‘near

death' experience can do (maybe like sliding through a busy intersection surviving no hits- or spinning out of control on a highway and feeling like it was noon- because in a flash you see everything like under a spotlight brightly- (I recall what still makes me shake thinking about it, one time my grandfather and I were in my dad's truck with a load of wood cut trunks-huge pieces, and going through downtown Owensboro- busy intersections- and I came to light- stopped (I pretty sure looked- and the proceeded thorough. He said, 'That was red light' I said 'I stopped' but played it like a stop sign, not a wait-red light..... How we did not get plowed in side I don't know —so near misses can bring about that transforming light (God watches over children and idiots like me I guess), But with medical near death experiences there is a lot of light vision talked about, too-tunnels, bathed in light etc). I mention this near death experiences that can awaken or enlighten us to fuller horizons, because there is a tradition in the Old Testament of the faithful not being able to see God face to face and surviving. Exodus 33:20 says "You cannot see my face, for no one can see me and live." This radical change (or type of death) resulting from seeing God, is not really too much a surprise, because the fact that union with God may dissolve some parts of our selves is consistent with Christ saying that 'to truly be my disciple, one must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23)

But it is not just such scary times that can re-orient our lives with flashing light, but also think of great victories and accomplishments- think of a first time marathon runner- who amazed may ask themselves, "Did I just complete a full marathon?" Some first time marathoners have finished them and say later "I remember nothing except the glaring sun in my eyes, crossing the line-everything blended into the light" That is a peak experience or mountain top events - a boost in morale that can give motivating confidence to all those other days, when you think "Am I going to make it through the drudgery of today". Maybe today we don't use the phrase 'peak experience' (Maslow's positive psychology 1970-80's). Today terms like 'triggering flow' or 'in the zone' are used to describe the same experiences (descriptive qualities of such states of mind include 'union of self with environment', feeling so free one seems to float, fruitful spontaneity, expressive artistry, pure play, timelessness, and creativity- or in one word-**bliss** (if you are a fan of Joseph Campbell the great teacher of comparative religion) or our catholic Latin theologians called it 'Claritas' or St Thomas Aquinas 'Beatific Vision-Union with God'. I think of these transfiguration Jesus-moments as simply enough, just keeping in mind the hilltop perspective especially for when we are down in the valley. What lifts you back out of the hole is to remember the view from above. So we read about the 'transfiguration' in Lent to realize what God can accomplish in us. God can change us. **We can be better than our sins**, we can cut out hurtful actions that bring us and others suffering, by drawing closer and closer to God. Our prayer sacrifice fasting and almsgiving helps us see and let go, move beyond- what keeps us down in the valley-in the hole; what is it, is it

device a phone, a game, a substance, a habit-whatever holds us back from giving more of ourselves to God- these things pull us down. In fact, we must let go of them to be opened to receive more of what God is offering us. I have to empty out of my hand what is preventing me from being open to receive more from Him. The Church flashes before us this peak experience of Jesus on the mountain showing the glory of His divinity to prod us along to take actions to bring about the revelation of what our own selves can become by his grace. 1 John 3:2-3 says it this way, *"We are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."* That is our Lenten Transfiguration. *Change us, Lord.* So, the Transfiguration is a type of pep-rally, to continue on our Lenten practices of increased prayer, sacrifice and charitable work. Jesus shows us what we can become if we keep climbing the mountain with Him.