

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Lent Year "A"

March 11-12, 2017

Readings: Genesis 12: 1-4; 2 Timothy 1: 8-10; Matthew 17:1-9

In the summer of 1988 I was privileged to attend a six-week summer session in Israel, visiting many biblical landmarks so central to our faith along the way. It had its challenges. Spartan accommodations and frankly bland food from the sponsoring organization did not help. Nor did the heat- but I could put up with all that to get the glimpse of the sacred places where Jesus walked.

Twice per week we shared a bus with a group of biblical archaeologists for longer day trips to explore the various biblical places, but it soon became apparent that we were sharing the bus with them and not the other way around. Their interests always carried the day. After my fair share of archaeological digs, combing through endless pottery shards, I wanted to see some spiritually important locations. What about all the New Testament sites?

One day we were parked on a road and could see the beautiful mountain of the Transfiguration, Mount Tabor, six miles outside of Jerusalem. "Up there is Mount Tabor," pointed the guide. "Everyone get out your cameras...While we do not have time to go to the top, you can get a sense of its majesty from here." "Are you kidding me," I thought? The moans and groans from our half of the bus were palpable. I never made it to the top that day, and would wait for thirty years for my only other trip to the Holy Land- this time, I would not be deterred.

We are told in the second reading to bear our share of the Gospel hardship for Christ. The faithful Christian does this willingly, until we feel that we have reached the breaking point. I received only a glimpse of the glimpse, so it seemed ironically appropriate.

We are blessed to have, not one, but three accounts of the Transfiguration—from the gospels of Sts. Matthew, Mark and Luke. The essentials of the account are the same to be sure, each with particular emphases under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit.

Peter was prepared to set up three booths for the two guests and Jesus, a reference to the Jewish feast of Tabernacles or Booths, a harvest festival that included the building of temporary booths to symbolically recall the years of wandering in the desert. But Peter was misunderstanding the nature of this visit from the past. Far from a denigration of the vital role of the prophets of old, it is another sign that what we have here is a new covenant. Recall the words of St. John the Baptist, “He must increase, I must decrease.”

There is one key line worth mentioning in this account. Only St. Matthew includes the detail that when the disciples heard the voice, “they fell prostrate and were very much afraid.” Jesus then came and touched them, reassuring them. No other evangelist includes this detail. Why were they afraid? That question appears to be fairly easy to answer. Wouldn’t you?

Perhaps it was a mixture of fear and excitement, of wonder and awe. But it would be easy to understand if it were fear. Sometimes, our fear to encounter God is based upon the realization that to encounter him in such a magnificent way might be more than we can handle, or more than we wish to handle.

Perhaps we are more comfortable keeping God at a safe distance, wherein we have the control. We do not necessarily want Him entering into our lives so intimately, so closely. Do we really want to draw so close to Jesus? I hope that our Lenten reflection allows us to give a definitive Yes to this question, as the Lord Jesus is waiting to enter in to our lives in profound ways.

The Transfiguration is a foretaste of heavenly glory, the dazzling white clothes a symbol of the purity of heaven. One day, God willing, we can say, “Lord, it is good that we are here.”

The disciples had just previously been told of the heavy cost of discipleship. Could this have been a reward for those who remained with him? Undoubtedly, a week or so before, some who heard the teaching of Jesus decided they were not ready for this kind of a commitment. “Take up my cross daily,” they thought? Not I. However, for those who respond, “Yes,” this was a glimpse of what lay ahead in the future.

For us today, there is a great lesson in the Transfiguration. We share in the glory of Christ by sharing in both his humiliation and triumph through our works of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. If by now, you are starting to notice how difficult it is to persevere in your mortifications of Lent, take heart. Take courage. What ultimately remain ahead for each of us are glory and triumph, not death and destruction. The Gospel of the Transfiguration, in all three of its versions, is rich fare for our Lenten meditation. Let us take to heart its lessons and its promises.