

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Lent A  
March 7-8, 2020

*Rise, and do not be afraid.*

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

“Rise, and do not be afraid.” The sense of relief that must have been in the minds of the three disciples is easy to imagine. The account of the Transfiguration is a powerful reminder of the joy that comes from being in the presence of our loving and protecting Lord. But notice, it was not the words alone of Jesus that put them at ease. We are told that Jesus touched them and spoke. Only then did they raise their eyes.

When I was a child of about five or six, we welcomed a new puppy to the family. Sometimes when she was afraid, as puppies do, she hid under a bed, with only the second half of her body visible, to be delicate. We had to coax her out with a gentle voice. She also hid under the peony bushes, but that may have been more out of a shady place to nap than fear. So, why were the disciples afraid?

Think about it- was anything spoken from the voice of concern? No, the voice of God says, “this is my beloved son, listen to him.” Are those frightening words? Obviously, the mere fact of a voice from heaven is remarkable. But the words themselves hearken back to the Baptism of Jesus, we are told that a voice came from the heavens, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Here, three additional words are added-“listen to him.”

The account of the Transfiguration confirms that Jesus is the Son of God and points to fulfillment of the prediction that he will come in his Father’s glory at the end of the age.<sup>1</sup> This event followed closely upon the first prediction of Jesus’ passion. It was finally dawning upon them the depths to which they were called to follow Jesus. There was no turning back now- it was “Game on,” so to speak.

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<sup>1</sup> cf. New American Bible, footnote to Matthew 17:1-8.

The account only mentions the place by describing it as a “high mountain.” It is not named, though it is commonly believed that it was that of modern Mount Tabor, located about 4 miles from Nazareth. Today, Mount Tabor takes about two hours to climb, with an elevation of 1,886 ft. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century a series of 4,300 steps was built for pilgrims to access this site. Imagine how difficult it must have been in the time of our Lord.

Jesus took the apostles to this place in order to draw them much closer to himself; they became a group within a group, the very closest companions of Jesus. Their personal relationship brought with it these beautiful graces but also an added responsibility. If we desire to be close to Jesus, are we equally willing to pay the added cost of that discipleship?

“Rise, and do not be afraid.” In the Church today, we cannot be in a close personal relationship with Jesus without embracing the cross. It is neither an add-on, nor is it not able to be separated from that relationship. It is a constitutive part of it.

Are you afraid of how others view you when you make the effort to go to Mass, even while on a weekend trip, or while trying to manage tournaments that all too often consume the weekend for your kids? Are you afraid to offer a simple Grace before eating a meal in a restaurant? Are you afraid to refrain from laughing when someone makes an off-color joke at the lunch table? In short, one mark of solid discipleship is whether or not our lives on Monday through Friday look the same as it does on the weekends?

“Bear your share of the hardship for the Gospel.” With this admonition, in our second reading Saint Paul reminded Timothy that part of being a disciple of necessity entails enduring hardships. But he quickly follows that by adding that we ought to bear that hardship “with the strength that comes from God.”

This adds something very important to the equation. Not all hardships are on the same level- more importantly, not all people experience the same number of trials in their life.

On a human level, it is easy to say that this is not fair. Why do some have to endure so much? And yet, in faith we believe that the Lord can and will sustain us in our struggles. And He will sustain us with the strength necessary to endure.

But that weight is greatly reduced if we can help others to bear part of that weight, just as Simon of Cyrene did for Jesus.

As we continue our Lenten journey, let us embrace this season. Lord, it is good that Lent is here, because in the end, we will have drawn closer to you.