

2nd Sunday of Lent Year “B”

February 25, 2018

Catching Only Glimpses.

Readings: Genesis 22: 1-2, 9-13, 15-18; Romans 8: 31-34; Mark 9:2-10

Have you ever had a momentary “brush with greatness,” meeting a famous person? The question presumes we agree on what constitutes fame. While on a spiritual pilgrimage to Italy, I once literally stumbled upon a scene of celebrities, but was more intrigued with watching the fans leaning, stretching, all to get a glimpse of someone famous.

I recognized just one of people towards whom they were straining to catch a glimpse. Their names and faces meant either little or nothing to me. When I relayed that to a photographer behind me, he offered me \$100E on the spot to switch places. He moved up one row to my place, I stepped and was \$125 richer because of it. It was the easiest money I have ever made. All to catch a glimpse!

The event of the Transfiguration is all about glimpses, glimpses of glory, but not for a movie star, but for the glory revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, transfigured before the eyes of Peter, James and John. Pope Leo the Great wrote beautifully of this event:

The great reason for this transfiguration was to remove the scandal of the cross from the hearts of his disciples, and to prevent the humiliation of his voluntary suffering from disturbing the faith of those who had witnessed the surpassing glory that lay concealed.¹

Why do we need these ‘glimpses of glory,’ and is this need a sign of weakness on our part? I do not think so. Think for a moment about our Catholic faith. Part of its genius is that it is a tangible faith, one that makes full use of sights and senses. The sacramental signs can be touched and tasted, the sweet aroma of the Chrism Oil wafts through the air when placed on the crown of an infant’s head.

¹ (Pope St. Leo the Great, *Sermo 51*, 3-4, 8: *PL 54*, 310-311, 313)

These signs draw us into the deeper life of faith and grace that come with the sacraments. Certainly when we acknowledge that God can forgive sins, even apart from the sacrament of Penance, it is because God is not bound by the sacraments, and surely His mercy would not be lacking to one who called to the Lord for mercy going into battle, or in an emergency, just because a priest was not available. And yet, we know in our innermost core that the comforting words, “I absolve you from your sins” is both a confirmation of God’s mercy and a comfort to all who long to be reconciled to God.

In the event of the Transfiguration, the disciples see Jesus in an entirely new light. They witnessed that change as something done to Jesus; the verb is in the *passive* voice.

Thus, the disciples suddenly and in an instant see the tables turned in that it is clear that: “Everything about Jesus which appears to be his ‘nature’ must now be interpreted by the disciples’ faith as the action and love of God.”² It would take Saint John’s Gospel to fully explicate this teaching, “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.” For St. John it is as if the entire life and death of Jesus Christ are one ‘transfiguration,’ that is, the love of God glorifying itself. (*Ibid.*, p.672)

As we enter more deeply into the heart of Lent, the difficulties of our penances may be more readily apparent. I for one, find myself reaching for certain items of food, just because that is what I am accustomed to doing, and once again it forces me to step back and think. Is this not the whole point? The glimpse of glory to which we are privy on the Second Sunday of Lent by means of the Transfiguration, shows forth the wisdom of the Church. She knows that we need this momentary glimpse, not of a movie star or sports hero, but of our divine Savior, sent from heaven to heal and save us.

² (Hans Urs von. Balthasar, “The Glory of the Lord,” vol. 1, page 671)