

2nd Sun. Lent 2023

I have a Diocesan Clergy meeting in Wichita this Tuesday evening and so there will be no Mass here Tuesday evening. Also, I'll be leading the St. Mary's teachers retreat on Friday in Pilsen, and so there will be no morning Mass here on Friday either. Because the students don't have school either of the next two Fridays, there will be no 3:00pm Stations of Cross, not until March 24.

+ Two weeks ago I told you that part me looks forward to Lent, because it's an opportunity to purify oneself from things holding you back from God...to grow in holiness, striving for perfection. Well, a week and a half in and it doesn't seem so exciting anymore. Whether it's because our Lenten observances are harder than we thought they'd be, or maybe we've already experienced failure of some sort, slacked off on those commitments. Please don't tell me that's just my experience. Either way, it's about this time, these next couple weeks, that we can get discouraged...find our zeal fading a bit, loose heart a little. But, that's why by God's providence, our Lord was transfigured; and why the Church selects this reading for today.

Today's Gospel passage comes from the beginning of chapter 17 of Matthew. But the first three words of the chapter are actually missing from today's passage that I just read. It skips over, "After six days" Jesus took Peter, James, and John up the mountain. By providing us a timeline, it shows that in some sense, what happened at the end of chapter 16 is somehow connected with what happens at the beginning of chapter 17. What happened at the end of chapter 16...Jesus had just gotten done informing his disciples that he would have to suffer and die. Peter objects to this though, refusing to accept this destiny of his Lord.

Perhaps Peter's objection flowed from a certain awareness that if Jesus was going to suffer and die...that somehow meant he had a similar destiny. And indeed Jesus all but confirms that suspicion because it's here that Jesus says, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." If you wish to save your life you must lose it. That is

not an easy teaching to accept. But our Lord wouldn't be willing to loose followers over this teaching unless it were absolutely necessary. And because this dying to self is required for following Christ, we have the season of Lent. Still though, self-denial and embracing the cross is not fun, and so part of us, like Peter, wants to resist this.

But God understands our weakness, our human condition...how we struggle to persevere. And so He offers us consolations and encouragements when we need them. It's no coincidence that the Transfiguration occurred when it did. The three disciples who were with Jesus were gifted by seeing Jesus in his divine magnificence. It was a hint at the glory Jesus would enjoy after suffering and dying. A lesson for Peter, that what you must suffer will not last forever; and not just that, but in the end you will be rewarded beyond imagination.

Later in life Peter came to understand this. It's why in first Peter, he says, "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little, will himself perfect you and confirm you and establish you." St. Paul understood this too. By seeing the big picture, was able to put suffering and trials in the right context. He said, "I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not to be compared with the future glory that is to be revealed in us." This is the purpose for the Transfiguration, to remind us of what awaits us... to strengthen our resolve in following Christ where ever the cross may lead.

As we enter the more trying days of Lent, when the zeal has faded and Easter still a ways off, we must keep our eyes on the prize...on God. As St. Paul wrote to Timothy in today's second reading, we can bear our hardships for the Gospel because we have been given the strength that comes from God. The Transfiguration shows us that God will provide the encouragement and strength we need. It's important to draw from that source when we feel

depleted or on the verge of giving up. Or when we need the inspiration to begin again after falling.

What are the transfiguration moments in your life? Those times where God blessed you in a unique way, allowing you to perceive His nearness, the intimacy of His love. If nothing else, reflect on the blessings from God that you're most grateful for. It's incredibly helpful to have access to those past encounters and memories, drawing spiritual refreshment from them in the present. They serve us well, reminding us that God is trustworthy...that the current suffering or hardship will not last forever...this too will pass. And it will give way to the glory of the Resurrection, the reward of infinite happiness and eternal life. So don't be discouraged, but let God renew your perseverance in what you set out to do.