

Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Lent, Year C

March 16, 2025

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

First Reading: Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18 (God makes a covenant with Abraham.)

Responsory: Psalm 27 (The Lord is my light and my salvation.)

Second Reading: Philippians 3:17-4:1 (He will change our lowly bodies to be like his.)

Gospel: Luke 9:28b-36 (Jesus is transfigured before his disciples.)

Every year, on the Second Sunday of Lent, we hear the story of Jesus' Transfiguration. The images are striking and memorable. Jesus appears in glory – his face radiant and his clothes a dazzling white. He is accompanied by Moses and Elijah, the two greatest figures from the Old Testament, symbolizing the Law and the Prophets. Then, a mysterious cloud suddenly arises, first casting a shadow over Peter, John and James, and then engulfing and terrifying them. Finally, the mighty voice of God thunders, "This is my chosen Son; listen to him." Then, in the blink of an eye, it's all over. The cloud disappears. Moses and Elijah are gone. Jesus is found alone, looking exactly the same as before. It's as if nothing ever happened.

Actually, one could argue that nothing *did* happen *to Jesus*. We know that he was already the Son of God and the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity long before he ascended that mountain with his disciples. He already possessed the fullness of divine glory before he became incarnate, taking on the lowliness of human flesh. However, Jesus' disciples did not know that about him. They knew him only as a *human being* who possessed extraordinary powers and extraordinary insights into God's ways. Shortly before this episode, Jesus had asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" and, "Who do *you* say that I am?" The consensus among the crowds was that Jesus was a great prophet. Peter went even further, declaring him to be the Messiah. But, no one had the faintest idea who Jesus really was, for his glory had remained hidden from their sight, *until* that experience on the mountaintop.

When Peter, John and James first wake up and see Jesus in his glorified state, conversing with Moses and Elijah, they do not understand what they are witnessing. Keep in mind, the last thing that Jesus said to his disciples before ascending the mountain was that some of them would not taste death before they see the reign of God. In addition, Jesus spoke of coming in glory with the Father and his holy angels. So, perhaps these disciples were anticipating something like the Transfiguration. Gazing upon this marvelous spectacle, they must have thought that they were seeing Jesus entering into his glory and bringing about the long-anticipated Reign of God on earth. It was beginning *right there before their eyes*, and they were privileged to be the first witnesses. Naturally, others would follow. So, Peter thought it made perfect sense to build three tents there, in honor of Jesus, Moses and Elijah, to immortalize that place and that event, where the Reign of God was made manifest in the sight of men. But, in the words of St. Luke, "He did not know what he was saying." In fact, the Transfiguration was *not* the moment when Jesus entered into his glory. If so, his glory would not have disappeared when the vision ended. Rather, this was the moment when Jesus' disciples first caught a

glimpse of the glory that he *already possessed* in secret. At the same time, the vision foreshadowed how Jesus would bring about the reign of God that he had promised.

If the disciples had really *listened* to Jesus, as the voice from the cloud commanded, they might have understood what Moses and Elijah represented in the vision. Luke says that they were conversing with Jesus about “his *exodus* that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.” What an interesting choice of words! Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection are described as a new *Exodus*, like the famous story of liberation told in the Old Testament. In that story, the mighty hand of God *freed* his people from slavery in Egypt, *rescued* them from certain death by allowing them to pass through the waters of the Red Sea, and led them to a *new life* of peace and security in the Promised Land. Jesus’ death on the cross would accomplish a similar, but much greater, *exodus* for all believers. It would free all of us from slavery to *sin*, rescue us from the *mortality of our human condition*, allowing us to pass through the impenetrable barrier of *death*, and lead us to the joy of *eternal life* in the Kingdom of God.

Just days before going up the mountain, Jesus tried to explain this “Paschal Mystery” to his disciples. He told them that the Son of Man must endure many sufferings, be rejected by the religious authorities, be put to death, and be raised up again on the third day. After his resurrection, he would walk his disciples through the Scriptures to show them how the Law and the Prophets *foretold* that the Messiah must suffer in this way. And, in the vision on the mountaintop, there were Moses and Elijah, the embodiment of the Law and the Prophets, speaking with Jesus about how this *exodus* would be accomplished.

I suppose we could fault the disciples for not listening. But, to be fair, they probably listened attentively and still did not understand. None of them could grasp the concept that God’s Anointed One could suffer and die, especially at the hands of their own religious leaders and the secular Roman authorities. In their understanding, the Messiah was supposed to wield the power of God. He could do whatever he wanted. He could conquer any foe who dared to oppose him. Actually, that was all true. Jesus *could* conquer his enemies by the divine power at his disposal. But, he did not consider the Jewish religious authorities, or even the Romans, to be his enemies. He had two enemies: *sin* and *death*. And the only way to conquer *them* was to submit to the Father’s will and offer up his life for the salvation of all. That is what he did, and the Law and the Prophets foretold that it would be so.

The Transfiguration revealed who Jesus *is*, but, at the same time, it also revealed who *we* are to *become*. Because of the “*exodus*” that Jesus accomplished, we can look forward to the glory of heaven foreshadowed on that mountaintop. As St. Paul says in his Letter to the Philippians, “Our citizenship is in *heaven*.” Jesus “will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body.” We will become immortal, like him, and share in his glory. That’s why we should not allow our minds to be preoccupied with earthly things, as if our lives will end here. Instead, we should seek the things of heaven and look forward to eternal life with Christ. For now, our vision is limited. We see only brief glimpses of the glory that awaits us. But, one day, we shall see Christ as he is. He will be transfigured, and *so will we*.