

**Transfiguration for Our Transformation** Second Sunday of Lent/A March 16, 2014  
8:15 AM 12:30 PM Gn 12:1-4a; **2 Tm 1:8b-10**; **Mt 17:1-9** (For a moment the apostles, just three of them: Peter, James, and John, had the veil removed from their souls and they could see the Light that Jesus is.)

It helps us to understand the gospels to **put ourselves in the sandals of the disciples**. They spent their entire **day-by-day existence with Jesus, but it wasn't necessarily exciting**. A disciple was supposed to cook for his master, clean his clothes, do his errands and as you all know that's very boring. They did witness signs and wonders and yet those signs and wonders might not have been so wonderful because they didn't move the hearts of many people.

Now here is something really different; **the transfiguration of Jesus is really a spiritual, religious experience of God, who is Light**. That's **not just a metaphor**. When people see God they actually see light, not with their eyes, but with their souls made in the image and likeness of God. This sort of mystical experience has a tradition that goes way back in Jewish history. You will remember **Moses**, Moses also on a mountain speaking with God for a long time. It was said forty days and forty nights. That's a way of saying a long time. Light came from his head, so much so and so uncomfortable for people to look at, they covered it with a towel. That's in your Scriptures. And you will know that artists have often depicted saints with light emanating; **halos** they are called. **Some people who have unusual gifts can actually see auras around everybody**. So this light is not something really metaphorical. In a way God really is Light. There really is light in us. **We emanate light**.

Isaiah, also a visionary, prophesied: "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will destroy the veil that veils all people. He will destroy death forever." And Matthew, in telling the story of Jesus on the mountain, wants his readers to think about Isaiah too: "On this mountain the Lord will destroy the veil." **For a moment the apostles, just three of them: Peter, James, and John, had the veil removed from their souls and they could see the Light that Jesus is**. Light is life. Darkness is death. **This is a revelation of resurrection, the coming good that God wants for us**. This is also the light that St. Paul is talking about when he says, "We carry around in ourselves a treasure in earthen vessels." The treasure is our godliness; we are made in God's image and likeness. **We carry it around in earthen vessels, our physical body. This treasure is also light**. Although hidden from our senses, our true reality is this light and our true destiny is life eternal with God. It used to be said—it was said in the Old Testament—that anyone who saw God would die, but we know that's not true. Some people saw God and didn't die. What it really means is that most people who see God don't want to live anymore on this earth without that vision; there is something so attractive about it. But sometimes people who have this vision are sent back to their regular work and that was the case here.

We might ask ourselves, why did Matthew tell this story? What does he want us to get out of it? I think St. Paul, the second reading, zeroes in on what Matthew is trying to get at. Paul says, **"Bear your share of the hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God."** That was what Jesus was trying to tell Peter, James, and John. They had to bear their share of the hardship which the gospel entails. We all do if we are going to be faithful. Too

often spiritual experience takes people away from the world, but **Jesus' whole mission is to the world.** I quote from the Fourth Gospel: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." The mission is **to save and redeem what is lost.** All our consolations and blessings are to **help us move with Jesus toward the world and bring life.**

And of course this involves **great risk.** We have to surrender what the world considers security. When we follow God we have no guarantees how things will work out. **All we have is the promise** that on the other side of life we will be with him. But meanwhile we don't know. **Following God can involve a great deal of suffering,** as the saints have found out. Peter James, and John were Jesus' most intimate or among his most intimate friends, and they were going to experience the stress of his passion, which always happens. It happens in your life as well. When people you love have terrible passions, when they suffer, when they have trials, you suffer too. So it was to be with Peter, James, and John. They also experienced their inability to cope. They could not cope. **They failed to cope.** And perhaps if it hadn't been for this moment on the holy mountain, they would have given up altogether, but they rallied. **They turned around and eventually spearheaded the mission we call Church.**

In this story Peter suggests, "Let's build three tents;" let's stay here; it's such a good place to be. That's equivalent to wanting to die when one sees God. But it didn't work out this time. **Staying put was not an option. We all have to be on our way accompanying Jesus on his trek to Calvary.** That is what God is looking for: men and women who are willing to go where he goes, even though it may cause suffering and pain. This is the tough side of the gospel, the commitment side. It's not all about peace and joy. **It's about tough choices.** And it's not always onward and upward. Peter stumbled. **The disciples abandoned him. But gradually with the aid of the Holy Spirit they turned around and took up the challenge.**

**And with the aid of the Holy Spirit so can you.** There's no one in this church today that does not face some **challenge in life.** It could be in the family or it could be at work or it could be in the wider society. We live in a very troubled world. **Doing the right thing may be very painful.** It may surely be very unpopular, and it may cost us dearly. But is our commitment to God only for days when things are going swimmingly? Or **do we understand that just when things are difficult and hard that's when our faith really matters?** Can we convince ourselves of that and pass that conviction on to our young, our youth? None of us can save the world, and we are not supposed to. None of us can save ourselves, and we are not supposed to. But **we all can make a contribution to God's great work,** and it is important that we do. The message of the Cross is that beyond all our human achievements and beyond all our human failures there lies a stupendous gift from God, and all the good and evil that we are involved in in this life all makes sense only from the perspective of where we end up at the end.