

Second Sunday of Lent: On Being Transfigured

There is some seriously strange stuff going on in the readings for this Sunday. Abram, that's Abraham before he got promoted, asked God for a sign that he really is going to possess great lands and have countless descendants. God tells Abram to cut a cow, a goat, a ram, a dove and a pigeon in two. Where was PETA when they needed it? Abram guards the carcasses shooing the vultures away, and then, at night a smoking pot and fiery torch appear and pass between the pieces. Seriously strange.

Jesus takes Peter and the boys up a mountain and then his face and garments start glowing. Moses and Elijah appear. Jesus and Moses, the Father of the Law, and Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, talk about what Jesus was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. Then there is the voice, "This is my Chosen One, listen to Him." Again, strange, seriously strange.

These are mysteries, mysteries in the sense of mystical. Something takes place which is beyond normal human actions to express a deeply spiritual event. The ancients of Abraham's time would seal a covenant by walking through the halves of sacrificed animals, saying "May God cut me in half if I am not true to my word." The smoking pot and torch that pass through the pieces of animals is God saying that He will be true to the promises made to Abraham, his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the sky. His land would be all the land he saw. Why did God give this assurance in such a mystical way? He did this to demonstrate that he would be true to mystery.

Today's readings help us to refocus on the spiritual in our lives, to refocus on the mystical. The mystery of God has entered human history in the covenant God made with this wandering Armenian, Abram, whom he now names Abraham. St. Paul tells the Philippians that they should not be like the Pharisees who are so concerned with Jewish dietary laws that "Their God is their belly," and so proud of their circumcision that "their glory is in a shameful part of their body." The problem was that they were not allowing mystery, the mystical, to enter their lives. "Our citizenship is in heaven," St. Paul says. The spiritual is what matters. We have to allow God to transform our minds by his spiritual reality. We cannot allow ourselves to be reduced to a mere external following of physical laws. The spiritual must reign. The spiritual must transform the world.

We come upon Jesus at prayer on the Mountain. Even though the Transfiguration is presented in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, *Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke*, only *Luke* begins the account with the Lord at prayer. This is significant. The Lord is opening Himself to the presence of the Father. At peace, at prayer, He is transformed, transfigured, into a state that reflects the glory of God. Moses and Elijah appear. They also are radiant, reflecting the glory of God. Moses, the representative of the Books of the Law, Elijah, representing the Books of the Prophets, come to speak to Jesus, the very Word of God. They are speaking of God's plan for his

people, the conquest of the spiritual. Of course, the disciples, Peter, James and John, don't understand this. They are still looking for a physical kingdom. The spiritual is beyond them. The voice in the cloud is meant for them and us: "This is my Beloved Son, Listen to Him."

God wants to transform the world. He has established the Kingdom of the Spirit and called us as the new Chosen People. Following him does not mean merely performing certain external actions, like not eating pork or being circumcised, or simply coming to Church, showing up to get married, having our children baptized, receive communion or be confirmed. Following God means entering a spiritual, mystical relationship with him, a relationship that is present through our daily duties as well as when we are together at prayer.

On the Second Sunday of Lent we consider the way we are following the Lord. Do we allow ourselves to be exposed to the spiritual? Do we pray, really pray? Do we allow the spiritual to become real in our lives? Are we allowing God's plan to take effect in our world? Are we living as citizens of heaven, or is our glory the mere external following of our religion? If someone were to ask any of us, "What exactly is a Catholic?" in what terms would we form our answer? If we were to answer the question in terms of religious practices, such as "a Catholic is a person who goes to Church on Sundays, receives the sacraments, says the Rosary, etc," we would be given far too much importance to what we do and not enough importance to what God is doing. However, if we were to answer the question, "What is a Catholic?" in terms of what God does, if we were to say, "A Catholic is someone united to God in such a way that others experience the Mystery of God working in him," then it is God and his works that are the essence of lives. Few people are drawn to Catholicism because they want to do the things that Catholics do. People are drawn to Catholicism because they want to experience God as Catholics experience Him.

Spiritually alive, living with God, united in the Holy Spirit, we can become the Divine Magnet for the world. We began today's Gospel with Jesus at prayer, in union with the Father, entering into the mystery of his Being. He is transfigured. The disciples call out, "It is good for us to be here." Yes it is. It is good for all of us to be here in the presence of the Lord. We also are called into the mystery of our being, the depth of whom we are where physical and spiritual unite. We are called into our depth, into union with the Holy Spirit so others might say, "It is good for us to be here."

Transform us Lord. Transfigure us, Lord. You want the spiritual to be real in our lives. You knock on the door of our hearts. Help us to let you in. Help us to fight for the reign of the spiritual, the mystical. Help us to be vehicles of your presence.