

March 5, 2023
2nd Sunday of Lent
Matthew 17:1-9

Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and do not be afraid." And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone. As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, "Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Background:

On the First Sunday of Lent (last Sunday), the Church always reflects on the Gospel accounts of Jesus being tempted. In a similar fashion, on the second Sunday of Lent one of the accounts of the Transfiguration of Jesus is presented. This year, both of these accounts come from Matthew's Gospel. The last temptation in Matthew's Gospel is Satan taking Jesus "up to a very high mountain," where the devil says that he will give to Jesus all that he can see if he will worship him (Matt 4:8). In today's Gospel we again find Jesus, with his favored disciples, Peter, James and John, up a high mountain.

The mountain is a place of special encounter with God, and the connection with Moses and the events of the exodus are in the background as Matthew describes the transfiguration. Matthew describes Jesus by building on his community's understanding of Moses' role and relation with Yahweh. The Gospel writer also presents Jesus as much more important than Moses. While the faces of both Moses and Jesus became radiant from their encounter with God, it is only Jesus' garments that also "became white as light." Matthew's comment about Jesus' garments becoming white also links the Transfiguration to his Resurrection. When Mary Magdalene and the other Mary enter the empty tomb of Jesus, they are greeted by an angel whose appearance is described as like lightning, with clothing as white as snow (Matt 28:3).

The response of the disciples at the Transfiguration is a wish to stay in this moment (on the mountain), and they are fearful. The disciples are privileged to experience their own "mountaintop encounter" with God. They see Jesus transfigured before them alongside the greatest prophet (Elijah) and the greatest lawgiver (Moses) of their tradition. Of course they want to stay there! In their minds, what experience of God would be greater than this? But, there is also fear. Fear is always the response of one who is in the presence of God. Jesus' response to such fear, as at the resurrection, is a touch, along with the reassuring words, "Do not be afraid."

"And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them. They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage. Then Jesus said to them 'Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.'" (Matt 28:9-10)

As Matthew describes the Transfiguration, he links it to the beginning of Jesus' ministry and to the culmination of his ministry. In the closing line of the text, Jesus tells the disciples:

"Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man had been raised from the dead."

People who tend to be uncomfortable with visions and dreams as privileged places of God's revelation are given a wonderful opportunity in today's Gospel to reflect on the way God is striving to be present to them, and to ponder their openness and/or resistance to God's presence.

Reflection Questions:

1. What is your experience of climbing mountains?

2. Do you think that the disciples thought of Moses and others who climbed mountains to experience God as they were ascending this mountain with Jesus? If they did, what kind of thoughts or feelings might they have had as they climbed?
3. What would have been your thoughts if you were with them?
4. Peter suggested that they stay there with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. If you were among them, what would you be thinking and feeling as Peter makes this suggestion?
5. What do you think was going through the mind of the three disciples as they were coming down the mountain?
6. Jesus tells them not to speak of their experience "until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." If you are one of them, how do you understand this statement? How are you feeling as Jesus says this to you?
7. Have there been times when you felt like you were in a very special relationship with God? How have you talked about it? To whom have you spoken?
8. Do you desire the experience of Transfiguration, or are you content to "wait at the bottom" with the other disciples?
9. Does this Gospel help you to appreciate the season of Lent, and what your journey through this season is about? Can you take some time to talk with God about God's desire for you during this season?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click there will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for March 5, 2023, the Second Sunday of Lent

The Lord said to Abram: "Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you." Abram went as the Lord directed him.

Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.
Upright is the word of the Lord, and all his works are trustworthy.
He loves justice and right; of the kindness of the Lord the earth is full.
See, the eyes of the Lord are upon those who fear him, upon those who hope for his kindness,
To deliver them from death and preserve them in spite of famine.
Our soul waits for the Lord, who is our help and our shield.

May your kindness, O Lord, be upon us who have put our hope in you.

Beloved: Bear your share of hardship for the Gospel with the strength that comes from God. He saved us and called us to a holy life, not according to our works but according to his own design before time began, now made manifest through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus, who destroyed death and brought life to light through the Gospel.

Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. He was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him. Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and do not be afraid." And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone. As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, "Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Excerpts from Genesis 12:1-4; Psalm 33:4-5, 18-20, 22; 2 Timothy 1:8-10; and Matthew 17:1-9

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for March 5th, the Second Sunday of Lent, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The Gospel from Matthew is the story of Jesus' Transfiguration. "Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a mountain. His face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light, and Moses and Elijah appeared. A voice said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

The other readings also have references to transforming encounters, and trusting the Lord. In the first reading, from Genesis, the Lord tells Abram to "go forth from your kinsfolk to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you." Abram went as the Lord directed him. Psalm 33 declares, "The Lord's works are trustworthy. May your kindness, O Lord, be upon us who have put our hope in you." The second reading is from the second letter to Timothy, where Paul writes, "God called us to a holy life, according to his own design and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began, but now made manifest through the appearance of our savior."

Transforming encounters come out of trust in the Lord. "You will be a blessing," the Lord says. "The eyes of the Lord are upon those who hope for his kindness... The strength comes from God who brought life to light... Listen to him... It is good that we are here!"

Joe