

February 25, 2018  
Second Sunday of Lent  
Mark 9:2-10

After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them. Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified.

Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; then from the cloud came a voice, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them.

As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant.

#### Background:

The transfiguration of Jesus is based on the belief that gods can change into different forms. Some schools of mysticism believe that humans and animals can also change form. Movies like the Lord of the Rings trilogy and Harry Potter contain contemporary expressions of this understanding. In the Jewish tradition the righteous will take on a new heavenly form. Many people hope that their heavenly body will be much different than the body that is theirs while on earth. In the text here, Jesus is transfigured not in the sense of taking on a totally new form, but in the sense that the way he appeared to the disciples is dramatically altered.

The fact that Peter, James, and John are present and witness this event makes it an historical event, not one that takes place only in the spiritual world. Nor is it a vision or dream of some moment in the future when the fullness of God's presence will be revealed. Jesus is the only one who is changed, and he is the only one who enters into a dialogue with Moses and Elijah. But the disciples are participants in the event as it unfolds. They witness and participate in what is taking place: they see a change in Jesus' appearance, they recognize Elijah and Moses as they converse with Jesus, Peter addresses Jesus, they are overshadowed by the cloud, and they hear the voice from heaven speaking to them. What is taking place occurs in such a way that they can experience it and participate in it to some extent. From the text it is not clear if they were able to hear and understand the conversation that took place between Moses, Elijah, and Jesus.

Mark's community would have recognized many of the elements that Mark describes here as being similar to events from their religious heritage. Moses and Elijah each ascended a mountain and there encountered the presence of God. Both underwent a kind of transformation. When Moses returned with the tablets on which the commandments had been written, his face became so bright, after he had spoken with God, he had to cover it so that people could look at him. (Exodus 34:29-35) Elijah, when he died, was taken from earth in a flaming chariot. (2

Kings 2:11) For the people of the day, Moses and Elijah represented the law and the prophets, the whole of their religious tradition.

The cloud is another familiar image from the Hebrew scriptures that expressed the presence of God. For example: God spoke to Moses from a cloud; while in the desert a cloud led the people and would descend upon the tent whenever Moses entered to confer with God; a dark cloud totally enveloped the temple at its dedication so that the priests had to leave; and the Jews believed that when the Messiah returned the cloud would once again descend upon the temple.

Peter's suggestion that they build three tents on the mountain reflects the custom associated with the feast of Tabernacles, when the Jews remember a period of their history of living in tents as they wandered in the desert. By the time of Jesus, the feast not only celebrated an important aspect of their liberation from the slavery, but also took on overtones of hope for a time when they would be liberated once again. Peter's suggestion that tents be built may be an expression of his hope that this time of final liberation might be what is signaled by the events taking place before him. However, Jesus' exhortation as they come down the mountain to tell no one of the experience "except when the Son of Man has risen from the dead" reminds Peter that there will be no glory before Jesus' rejection and death. As Mark's community hears the description of Jesus' transfiguration, their own hopes for the future are also touched. Jesus' note of warning would help them maintain some hope as they hear Mark describe Jesus' rejection and death.

#### Reflection Questions:

1. What is your experience of climbing significant hills or even mountains?
2. Why do you think climbing a mountain is used as an expression of going to encounter God?
3. Have you had experiences that changed you?
4. How has your relationship with God changed you?
5. Do you feel more like Peter, James, and John, invited to go up the mountain with Jesus, or more like one of the disciples waiting at the bottom for their return?
6. As we begin Lent, what transformation do you hope for in the world, in the church, or in yourself?
7. Do you see the transformation you seek more as something you are called to strive after or as something that God is going to accomplish?
8. Why do you think the Church gives us this reading for the Second Sunday of Lent?
9. Can you talk to God about the change you would like to see within yourself, or about that change that you suspect God might be inviting you to undertake at this point in your life, or about some other thought that arises in you as you read this gospel?

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](mailto:annemarie.lom@gmail.com)

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. The homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. The third link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. The material is posted on Fridays and is available until the following Friday when the new material is posted. Excerpts from the Lectionary, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission.

*Please include this information when printing or forwarding.*

### **Excerpts from the Readings for February 25, 2018, the Second Sunday of Lent**

God put Abraham to the test. He called to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am!" he replied. God said: "Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you." When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. Then he reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the Lord 's messenger called to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!" "Here I am!" he answered.

"Do not lay your hand on the boy," said the messenger. "Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son."

As Abraham looked about, he spied a ram caught by its horns in the thicket.

So he went and took the ram and offered it up as a holocaust in place of his son.

Again the Lord 's messenger called to Abraham from heaven and said:

"The Lord declares, that because you did not withhold from me your beloved son, I will bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore; your descendants shall take possession of the gates of their enemies;

in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing—because you obeyed my command."

*I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living. I believed, even when I said,  
"I am greatly afflicted." Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones.  
O Lord, I am your servant, the son of your handmaid; you have loosed my bonds.  
To you will I offer sacrifice of thanksgiving, and I will call upon the name of the Lord.  
My vows to the Lord I will pay in the presence of all his people,  
In the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem.*

Brothers and sisters: If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?

Who will bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who acquits us, who will condemn?

Christ Jesus it is who was raised—who also is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. He was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them.

Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus.

Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here!

Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified. Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them;

from the cloud came a voice, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."

Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them.

As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen

to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant.

**Excerpts from Genesis 22:1-2, 9-18; Psalm 116:10, 15-19; Romans 8:31-34; and Mark 9:2-10**