

March 8, 2020
2nd Sunday of Lent
Matthew 17:1-9

After six days 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:

The gospel text for the First Sunday of Lent is always one of the accounts of Jesus in the desert being tempted. In similar fashion, the gospel text for the Second Sunday in Lent is always one of the accounts of Jesus being transfigured on the mountain with his three closest companion apostles, Peter, James, and John.

Matthew's account of Jesus' temptations ends with Satan taking Jesus "up to a very high mountain" (Matt 4:8). Once again, for the transfiguration, Jesus and the disciples have climbed up a very high mountain. This time Jesus is not in the company of Satan but rather with Moses and Elijah. At the end of the vision, the voice of God affirms their experience, and affirms that Jesus is one who has rightly represented the will of God and to whom they should listen.

Matthew has structured his descriptions of the temptation and of Jesus' transfiguration so that there are some parallels between the role that Moses and the events of the exodus played in shaping God's relationship with the people and the role that Jesus is now playing. But he also makes it clear that Jesus is more significant. 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 also links the Transfiguration to his Passion and Resurrection. When Mary Magdalene and the other Mary go to the tomb, they encounter an angel who is described as appearing like lightning, with clothing as white as snow. (Matt 28:3)

The response of the disciples at the Transfiguration is a desire to stay in this moment, and then they are fearful when God speaks from the cloud. The disciples, Peter, James, and John, 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. For these three disciples who had left their livelihoods to become disciples of Jesus in some hope that Jesus might be the one to usher in the reign of God, what could have been a more fulfilling experience? But this experience does not end there. There is a cloud, the voice of God, fear, a reassuring hand, and an invitation to join Jesus as he goes down the mountain and begins the slow journey to Jerusalem.

Reflection Questions:

1. What is your experience of climbing mountains?
2. Have you ever experienced the light of the sun that was so bright that it was blinding?
3. Have you ever felt like you had arrived at a place in your life that was so good that you thought to yourself in some way that it would be OK if the rest of your life stayed like this?
4. Can you imagine an experience of God that is so powerful, so personal, so real that you become afraid?

5. What have been your most personal experiences of God's presence? Is there always fading of the experience, and an invitation to come down the mountain?
6. Can you take some time now to talk with God about your experience of God's presence in your life, your desire for a mountaintop experience, or your thoughts and experiences of coming down the mountain?

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 on the icon 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.

Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Please include this information when printing or forwarding.

Excerpts from the readings for March 8, 2020, 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