



Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of March, 2012

by Terry A . Modica



2nd Sunday in Lent

March 4, 2012

Read:

Genesis 22:1-2,9-13,15-18

Ps 116:10,15-19

Romans 8:31b-34

Mark 9:2-10



Reflect:

Think of a "mountaintop experience" you've had. What generated it? Did it change your life forever or was it just a momentary high?

In Biblical symbolism, a mountain represents getting close to God. Did your mountaintop experience bring you closer to God?

It was at the top of Mount Tabor where Jesus revealed the glory of his Godliness to his closest friends. Called a "high mountain" in scripture, Mount Tabor is, in reality, not huge. What was huge is the event that took place there – and why.

The three disciples who witnessed Christ's transfiguration greatly benefited from seeing his glory revealed, because someday they would be commissioned to take over his earthly ministry.

The Father told them, "This is my beloved Son; LISTEN TO HIM." As we listen to Jesus, it is WE who are now transfigured.

Lent is meant to be a mountaintop experience for each of us. If we follow Jesus up the mountain, his light will consume any darkness within us. The more we listen to his teachings and apply them to our daily lives and ministries, the more we become like him. And the more we become like Jesus, the more our lives are transfigured by his light, and the more our lives then transfigure the world around us.

As the first reading tells us, Abraham did not withhold his son from the Lord; God the Father did not withhold *his* Son from us.

Likewise, we must not withhold the Son from the

people we encounter. Whether through a kind smile, or a helping hand, or a compassionate and attentive ear, or the generous giving of mercy and forgiveness or money or time, we are Christ's hands and feet in the world today. We are his voice of truth and his gift of healing. We are his earthly body. We are the answers to people's prayers.

We have been empowered through our baptisms to shine with the glory of Christ's love. We have all been commissioned to continue his earthly ministry. May the experience of Lent take us to new heights of union with Christ and his mission!

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Identify one area of your life that you would like Jesus to transfigure. What do you need to do to repent of it?

† How do you need to change – with God's help – so that others see more of Jesus?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Share the story of a time when you let Jesus change you. How difficult was it to be transfigured? Why did you want to make the change?

† How did it impact others?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

3rd Sunday in Lent**March 11, 2012**

Read:

Exodus 20:1-17

Ps 19:8-11

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

John 2:13-25

Reflect:

The final paragraph of the Gospel reading is very revealing: Jesus did not "trust" himself to the converts whose faith in him was based on the signs and wonders that he had done. The reason: He did not want anyone to testify about (i.e., have faith because of) the limitations of human nature.

Faith based on signs and wonders is human nature: It's easier to put faith in what we can humanly see, touch, and hear than to believe in a God who is invisible and who usually sounds very silent. There is nothing supernatural about this kind of faith, but God is very supernatural.

What happens to our faith when we pray and pray and pray for God's intervention and there are no signs indicating that we'll get what we want? This is an indicator of how natural or supernatural our spiritual life really is.

Jesus knew that his physical presence was the greatest sign of all, but it would soon be taken away. Don't we sometimes wish that Jesus would appear in front of us and make himself audible to our human ears? We think it would make our faith stronger.

Typically, we base our faith on many signs: prayers being answered, love being evidenced, peace and happiness filling our hearts, etc. But what happens to our faith when we enter the dark desert night of trials and difficulties? Do we continue to trust God when we can no longer see or feel signs that he cares?

The kind of faith we need when faith matters most comes from trusting God for who he really is and how much he really cares, rather than on what the evidence seems to say.



To succeed in this, we need supernatural faith. When we're united to the divinity of Christ, we join ourselves to his faith. We then trust him so much that we don't need signs.

Remember this the next time you receive Jesus in the Eucharist. Not only are you consuming his body, you are also uniting yourself to his divinity. And he is uniting himself to you! What he wants to give you most of all is HIS ALL.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What signs do you rely on to believe that God truly cares?

† How do you feel when those signs are taken away? Are these feelings based on the reality of God's love or on fear?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Have you ever wished that Jesus would appear to you? Why? Did God provide what you needed some other way?

† How do you remind yourself that God cares during those difficult times when you can't see it or feel it?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

4th Sunday in Lent

March 18, 2012

Read:

2 Chron 36:14-16,19-23

Ps 137:1-6

Ephesians 2:4-10

John 3:14-21



Reflect:

Why do we prefer to conceal our sins rather than face them and go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and speak about them out loud?

It's Jesus who meets us in the confessional, appearing to us in the form of a priest who's sworn to secrecy. In the Gospel reading, Jesus assures us that he did not come to condemn us. It is safe to come into the light where our sins are exposed.

However, we don't like going to Confession when guilt is driving us deeper into the darkness of low self-esteem, the fear of being unlovable, and an inability to forgive ourselves.

Guilt is a good motivator for repentance and change, but when combined with the messages of a poor self-image, we feel undeserving of forgiveness. We feel shame. And shame makes us even more afraid to expose the truth about our sins.

However, the very thing we fear is what will become our joy and healing if we dare to face the work of letting Jesus minister to us in the confessional. What keeps you away? Perhaps your starting point on the journey of healing needs to be a therapist, or a spiritual director, or the priest who will serve you in the confessional. Whatever opportunity will help you get into the confessional, this is where your healing lies.

Jesus completes the healing by curing your spirit with forgiveness, mercy, and unconditional love through the words of absolution that he speaks to you through the priest.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus points out that whoever lives the truth (whoever is honest about

themselves) "comes to the light" to be rescued. When we admit our sins, speaking it out loud to the ears of one of Christ's servants, we are rescued by Jesus. We hear Jesus minister to us through the vocal chords of the priest, and we receive from Jesus the power to resist the same sins in the future.

Why suffer any longer, hiding in the darkness of fear and a poor self-image? Jesus has come to rescue you!

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What do you feel ashamed about?

† Have you taken this to the Sacrament of Reconciliation? If not, what are you waiting for? Blessings and healing await you!

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† How are we set free to live in joy and peace by admitting our sins and receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

† Describe a time when you lived in darkness; how did Jesus bring you into the light?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

5th Sunday in Lent**March 25, 2012**

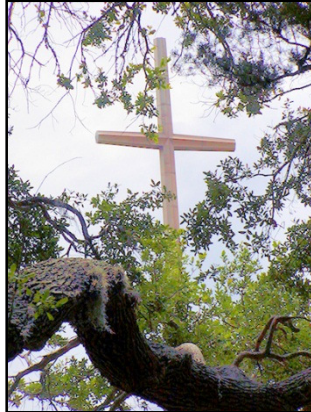
Read:

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Ps 51:3-4,12-15

Hebrews 5:7-9

John 12:20-33

**Reflect:**

In our desire to trust God and follow Jesus wherever he leads us, it's not a sin to feel troubled about it.

Yes, we do have to be willing to lose our lives (i.e., our own agendas, our own desires, our own ideas on what we should do with our time, etc.) so that we can unite ourselves to Christ and his mission. However, we don't have to like the loss.

The Gospel reading shows us that Jesus felt troubled by the sacrifices he would have to make. Yes even Jesus himself felt troubled! And the Father glorified him.

Jesus came to earth to reveal God's ways and God's love and lead us to heaven. Now we, his followers, are called, commissioned, and prepared by the Sacraments to reveal God's ways and God's love to those around us, so that Jesus can lead them to heaven. That is the mission, the purpose of being Church, for all of us – laity as well as clergy.

The Sacrament of Baptism initiates us into this calling. Confirmation commissions us to do it. Confession enables us to do it better by purifying us. Marriage and Holy Orders give us a venue for perfecting it. The Anointing of the Sick converts our illnesses into opportunities to bear witness to Christ's ministry. And the Eucharist unites us so fully to the Passion of Christ that we become what we are called to do.

This is our everyday ministry of evangelization: We love others as Jesus loves them, we do for them what Jesus would like to do for them, and we spread the good news about this as a continuation of the ministry of Jesus.

Often, this involves making difficult sacrifices and doing good to those who reject us, scourge us, crucify us, or in any other way cause us to suffer. This is our unity with Christ, our Passion. We're not supposed to like it, but we are supposed to do it.

The Father honors us for this. Just like he glorified Jesus, he honors us with his compassion, his rewards, and his approval.

It's okay to feel troubled by the challenges we face in our mission. What keeps us going is knowing that God is raising us up. There is always resurrection after crucifixion.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What troubles are you facing? Where is Jesus in this? Is he ahead of you, leading the way? Are you following him?

† How do you feel hearing Jesus admit, "I am troubled now"?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† When you make sacrifices for others, how does this connect you more closely to the human heart of Jesus?

† How does the Father honor you as you serve in Christ's mission?

Comments/Prayer Requests: