

February 25 II Sunday of Lent

The readings for the Second Sunday of Lent highlight Jesus' identity as God's beloved Son (revealed at his baptism and Transfiguration) and confront us with the mystery of his death on the cross. Hence, the main purpose of today's readings is to give us an invitation as well as a challenge to put our Faith in the loving promises of a merciful God Who sent His Son to die for us and to transform our lives by renewing them during Lent. Our transformed lives will enable us to radiate the glory and grace of the transfigured Lord around us by our Spirit-filled lives.

The first reading shows us how God saved the life of Abraham's son Isaac as a reward for Abraham's trusting Faith. Because of this Faith, the Lord renewed his promise to Abraham for the blessings of land and progeny. While Abraham's son Isaac was spared, God's beloved Son, Jesus, died a cruel death on the cross. The linking of this story with the Gospel reading emphasizes God's infinite love, as seen in the redemptive sacrifice of His Own Son for the salvation of the world. If the mystery of the requested sacrifice of Abraham's beloved son, Isaac, is hard to understand, the mystery of the death of God's beloved Son, Jesus, is far more challenging. That is why Paul reminds us, in the second reading, that God the Father did not spare His Own Son's life. What an irony and paradox! God spared Abraham's son, but not His own! Why? Because God loves us with an everlasting love. Paul interprets God's willingness to sacrifice His Own Son as proof of His great love for humankind and as God's pledge that He will always protect and provide for us. Today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 116) speaks of God's distress at the death of anyone. "Too costly in the eyes of the LORD is the death of His faithful."

In the transfiguration story (a theophany) in today's Gospel, Jesus is revealed as a glorious figure, superior to Moses (Ex 19-20; 34) and Elijah (1 Kgs 19:4-18) who experienced theophanies. He is identified by the Heavenly Voice as the Son of God. Thus, the transfiguration narrative is a Christophany, that is, a manifestation or revelation of Who Jesus really IS. Describing Jesus' transfiguration, the Gospel shows us a glimpse of the Heavenly glory awaiting those who do God's will by putting their trusting Faith in Him.

(1) Every sacrament we receive transforms our lives: Baptism, for example, transforms us into children of God and heirs of heaven while Confirmation

transforms us into brave witnesses of and warriors for Christ and Reconciliation transforms sinners into saints.

(2) The “transfiguration” in the Holy Mass is the Source of our strength: In each Holy Mass, the bread and wine we offer on the altar are transformed into the crucified and risen, living body and blood of Jesus by transubstantiation. Just as Jesus’ transfiguration strengthened the apostles in their time of trial, each holy Mass should be our Source of Heavenly strength against temptations, and our renewal during Lent. In addition, our Holy Communion with the living Jesus should be the Source of our daily “transfiguration,” transforming our minds and hearts so that we may do more good by humble and selfless service to others.

(3) Christ’s Transfiguration gives us the message of encouragement and hope: In moments of doubt and during our dark moments of despair and hopelessness, pain and suffering, the thought of our future transformation in Heaven will help us to reach out to God and to listen to His consoling words: “This is my beloved son.” Let us offer our Lenten sacrifices to our Lord so that, through these practices of Lent and through the acceptance of our daily crosses, we may grow closer to Jesus in his suffering, may share in the carrying of his cross, and finally may share the glory of his second “transfiguration,” namely, his Resurrection.

4) We need “mountain-top experiences” in our lives: We share the “mountain-top experience” of Peter, James and John when we spend extra time in prayer during Lent. Fasting for one day will help the body to store up spiritual energy. This spiritual energy can help us have thoughts that are far higher and nobler than our usual mundane thinking. The hunger we experience puts us more closely in touch with God and makes us more willing to help the hungry. The crosses of our daily lives also can lead us to the glory of transfiguration and resurrection.

5) We need transformation in our Christian lives so that we may seek reconciliation instead of revenge, love our enemies, pray for those who hate us, give to the needy without expecting a reward, refuse to judge others and make friends with those we don’t naturally like. This transformation will also enable us to hold back on harsh words and let love rule so that we may seek reconciliation rather than revenge, pray for those who give us a hard time, avoid bad-mouthing those we don’t agree with, forgive those who hurt us, and love those who hate us.