

March 8, 2009

The Gospel reading for this Second Sunday of Lent is complementary to last week's reading of Jesus' Temptation. While the Temptation of Jesus points to His Passion and Death, this week's Gospel of the Transfiguration anticipates Jesus' Resurrection and helps us keep our Lenten attention focused on Jesus.

In Mark's account, the Transfiguration occurs six days after Jesus instructed His disciples near Caesarea Philippi that He would have to suffer much, be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the Scribes, and be put to death. He followed the foretelling of His own Passion and Death with the instruction to His disciples that if anyone would come after Him, He must deny His very self, take up His own cross, and follow in His footsteps.

The experience of Jesus' Transfiguration seems to have been meant to encourage and strengthen the disciples as it remains a message of hope and encouragement for us who endure our own sufferings and misfortunes.

Jesus in all His glory stands at the center of the Transfiguration. On the one side stand Moses, who represents the Law, and Elijah, who represents the Prophets. On the other side of Jesus, Peter, James, and John represent the present and the future disciples of Jesus.

Peter, with James and John, is overwhelmed by this dazzling spectacle. Peter suggests that Jesus make it permanent for them.

Then a cloud casts a shadow over them, and from the cloud came a voice: "This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him."

Before Jesus would experience the glory of His Resurrection, He had to accomplish all that the Father wished for Him. He had to suffer rejection, His Passion and Death on the cross. So it is for us. Before we participate in the glory

of eternal life that Jesus has gained for us, we must bear the burden of the very ordinary circumstances in which we live and work, as well as the challenges of our various relationships. We must accomplish the purposes that God has for us. We, too, must bear our sufferings and crosses.

The compelling message of the Transfiguration is that we never bear our burdens or carry our crosses alone. “This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.” Jesus remains with us through His Holy Spirit, in His Sacraments, through His Word, in the gathering of the faith community, and especially in those in need.

After Christmas, when I was undergoing a rather challenging physical therapy because of the total knee replacement in both knees, I was sometimes pushed to the edge by the rigors and challenges of the therapy. My excellent therapist would then say, “Bishop, life is not meant to always be easy.”

In any given week, we are challenged to use our gifts as God intends, to bring forgiveness and compassion when we are hurt or misunderstood, to extend the love of God when we would rather remain self-focused.

We are reminded in this Sunday’s Gospel that we are not alone in our burdens and struggles. Jesus remains with us. “This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.” Truly, Jesus is our hope. He is the Way.