

Second Sunday of Lent

(Cycle C)

READING I: Genesis 15:5-12,17-18

DATE: 02/27-28/2010

READING II: Philippians 3:17-4:1

PLACE: Corpus Christi

GOSPEL: Luke 9:28-36*

TIME: 4:00 p.m.; 10:30 a.m.

EVENT: mass

THEME: There is no need for us to convert to something we already are; we need only be enlightened as to our identity as children of God, so that we can live out that identity fully.

I. An Unchanging God

- Many ancient Greeks believed that things that changed were finite and inferior.
- Things that did not change were infinite and superior.
- That idea greatly influenced Christian thought.
- For many Christians, God was conceived as the great unchanging reality to whom we strove to unite ourselves.
- Our goal was to live in a finite and passing world with our hearts and minds set on the never-ending life in heaven.
- We hear that idea echoed in Paul's letter to the Philippians today.
- The idea of an unchanging God eventually became attributed to Jesus himself.
- As God incarnate, Jesus himself was thought to be unchanging.
- His physical body could change, but his interior nature could not, so that Jesus knew from beginning to end that he was God.

II. Jesus and Transfiguration

- We see that idea play itself out in the way Luke tells today's story of the transfiguration.
- When Matthew and Mark tell that story, they use the Greek word *metamorphosis* to describe Jesus' change: a word that we use to describe the change that happens to a caterpillar when it becomes a butterfly.
- But Luke avoids that word altogether, choosing instead to tell us that only Jesus' *appearance* became "different."
- So, for Luke, Jesus did not undergo a metamorphosis at the transfiguration, as though he underwent a conversion, suddenly realizing that he was the Son of God.

- But by describing only the change in Jesus’ appearance and including the conversation that he had with Moses and Elijah, Luke portrays Jesus as developing a deeper understanding of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.
- In short, Jesus isn’t converted at the transfiguration: he’s enlightened.

III. Conversion in Lent

- As we enter our second week of Lent, many of us might find ourselves wondering just what is supposed to happen to us during this season.
 - We might be convinced that this is a season of serious conversion.
 - We want to become that caterpillar and metamorphose ourselves into a new person.
- And so we engage in all sorts of Lenten disciplines to force that change.
 - We deny ourselves pleasures, we intensify our prayer, we give to charity – all for the purpose of becoming a new creation in Christ.
 - And most of us fail miserably.
- That’s because that approach misses a central reality: we already *are* new creations in Christ by virtue of our baptism.
 - Baptism is the great sacrament of conversion, of metamorphosis.
 - Baptism is when we are first acknowledged as children of God, restored to our original goodness, and imbued with the capacity to unite ourselves to our eternal God.

IV. Enlightenment in Lent

- For those of us who are already Christian, then, Lent is not so much about conversion as it is about enlightenment.
 - It is not so much about becoming a child of God as it is about understanding what it means to be a child of God.
 - It is not so much about changing ourselves as it is about deepening our relationship with God.
- Soon after the transfiguration, Luke tells us that Jesus “sets his face” toward Jerusalem.
 - Now that he more deeply understands the purpose of his exodus in Jerusalem, he firmly resolves to live out his life as the Son of God.

- And for the rest of Luke's gospel, Jesus will resolutely travel to Jerusalem and live out his identity.
- And that is what Lent is meant to be for us, as well.
- Lent is a period for us to resolve firmly to live out our baptismal call.
 - A time not just to give up chocolate and goodies as a way of fasting, but to empty ourselves so that we can fill the needs of those who are poor.
 - A time not just to grow closer to God in prayer, but to grow closer in solidarity to those who work for justice and equal rights for all people.
 - A time not just to give alms, but to give of ourselves in caring for the sick and the homeless by working to ensure that they have access to adequate health care and affordable housing.
- Lent is a time to set our faces toward the kingdom of God, so that we can live as children of God.

V. Conclusion

- So, whatever you are doing for Lent this year, stop trying to convert yourself into something you already are.
 - Realize that you are already a child of God, and there is no further need of metamorphosis.
- Instead, let the eyes of your hearts be enlightened.
 - Set your face firmly on the kingdom of God.
 - And live as the child of God you already are.