

## Homily for February 28, 2010 (2nd Sunday of Lent)

My nineteen-year-old grandson Paul, who has been considering the priesthood now for about four years, is a freshman in college. For the first time, he is being exposed to many different faiths as well as to the lack of faith of some of the students. This exposure has been good for him in that it has raised questions and caused him to examine his own faith with an intensity that I have not seen before. In one of his e-mails he said, "I feel like my faith is lacking in a lot of ways. Until a little before I started asking questions, I did things rather passively. Now I am trying to do better, but I feel like I am not doing much. Now that I understand and know more, I need wholeheartedly to believe and I am not there yet."

Peter and James and John would, I think, understand my grandson. According to the Gospel of Luke, just eight days before the Transfiguration, Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, 'One of the ancient prophets has arisen.'" Then [Jesus] said to them "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said in reply, "The Messiah of God." Now that sounds pretty good to us, but you know my grandson Paul could say just about as much.

Now eight days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John—his inner circle of friends—the mountain to pray. As he prayed, he was transfigured and began conversing with Moses and Elijah. They "spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem." Now Moses and Elijah represent the Sacred Tradition of the Jews, Moses representing the Law and Elijah representing the Prophets. Both the Law and the Prophets spoke to God's people about his plan and purpose for them. He made with them a covenant of love, telling them, "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation." In today's reading Moses and Elijah speak of the exodus of Jesus in Jerusalem, which is his death and resurrection. This new exodus will initiate a new covenant not just between God and the Hebrews but between God and all the people of the world. This new exodus will occur on the anniversary of the exodus from Egypt, that time that is called Passover, and will be the fulfillment of that primordial event in salvation history.

When God freed the slaves from the bondage of the Pharaoh, according to the Bible itself, he redeemed them, he ransomed them, he saved them. God's actions before and during the exodus revealed him as a God who loves and wishes that everyone in bondage should be free. This same revelation is at the center of this definitive exodus, which is the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through Jesus we are redeemed, ransomed, saved; and as we hear, in the First Letter of Peter, those of us who are not Jews but are followers of Christ are now called to be "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own so that [we] may announce the praises" of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light" (I Peter 2:9)

Now what were those three in the inner circle of Jesus doing during his conversation with Moses and Elijah? “Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep.” Waking up, Peter as usual begins talking, but as the Scripture tells us, “he did not know what he was saying.” Now, notice, “[while] he was still speaking, a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud.” God finally got Peter’s attention.

Now I am not addressing this morning people who are passive and uninterested in growing in faith; I am addressing you. You may have been passive and, like my grandson, may be saying, “I feel like my faith is lacking in a lot of ways. Until a little before I started asking questions, I did things rather passively. Now I am trying to do better, but I feel like I am not doing much. Now that I understand and know more, I need whole-heartedly to believe and I am not there yet.”

Remember that God had to get the attention of Peter and the others who were on the mountain with Jesus. God has the attention of my grandson Paul now, and I think Paul may be expecting too much of himself too soon. It is true that growth in faith and in faithfulness does come almost at once for some people. That is what happened to Saul of Tarsus, who became St. Paul. But for most of us that growth is more gradual. Notice how gradually Peter and the others disciples grew in their faith. Peter remained in the presence of Jesus, according to the tradition of the Church, for forty days more before Good Friday, and during that time Peter heard Jesus teach and saw him heal the sick, but then, as you recall, he experienced the lowest point in his spiritual life: he denied even knowing who Jesus was after Jesus was arrested. And even after the resurrection when Jesus was about to ascend to the Father, still his disciples asked, “Lord are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?” Now I’m afraid that, had I been Jesus, I might have said, “Oh, dear God, did I suffer all this for nothing?” Our Lord is still patient; he knows that it takes time.

What I have told my grandson is that, in effect, our transfiguration takes part over a lifetime. Our life and our faith too has its ups and its downs, like those of Peter, but even in our weakest moments if we continue to follow Jesus, sooner or later God will get our attention as he got the attention of Peter, James, and John. As he said to them, so he will say to us: “This is my chosen Son; listen to him.” That is the message for all of us today. Stop talking and listen—listen to and learn from Jesus so that we too may be transfigured.

Deacon John McCully