

“To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often,” so stated Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman, the nineteenth century British scholar and convert to Roman Catholicism.

Change is built into the fabric of all life. Without change there is only death. Yet, change can be difficult. Change rocks your world. Change demands reorientation. Sometimes change happens before the new perspective it holds out is adequately in place or can be fully seen. We see this tension played out in society and in the church today.

Demographers have been telling us that in the future of our state, as also our nation, in a generation or two non-Caucasian people will constitute the majority of citizens as birth-rates among Caucasians continue to decline and waves of immigrants from the global south and Asia continue to settle among us. These same demographers point out that we need to find ways now and in the future to integrate these newest arrivals because much of what we will need in terms of human services will depend on there being able-bodied and educated to provide. Yet, this changing demographic is the source of much tension at this time.

In the church, there is a movement known as “The reform of the Reform” which seeks to restore forms of worship, teachings and practices to the time period that existed prior to the Second Vatican Council of over fifty years ago. Pope Francis is loudly criticized in some church quarters for his attempts to lead the church into engagement with the world rather than build a fortress against it.

On the Second Sunday in Lent the Church presents us with the traditional gospel account of the event of the Transfiguration. At its core, the Transfiguration is about change, change that is difficult, but needed. Peter in the gospel is caught in the tension of change—wanting things to stay the same and knowing that change is afoot, just like us.

The Transfiguration is that change moment, the threshold between what was and what is to come. Peter, James, John get a glimpse into the full truth of the person of Jesus—fully human, fully divine. It’s not that the disciples have not sensed something special in

Jesus. They just haven't seen change coming. It's not that they haven't recognized what change might look like as disciples of Jesus and its implications in their lives. They just wonder if they are ready; if they can handle it; if they are prepared for the consequences that will follow.

And so, Peter proposes building a tent. A tent is not a permanent structure, but still a structure, something to give Peter more time, to hold on to something he likely knows cannot be held, to enshrine an experience that can help him through the uncertain way ahead, to deal with the change, in the Jesus and the prospect of change in himself. Peter wants Jesus to stay; the memory to stay—the glory, the confirmation, the assurance. Yet, Jesus gently, but insistently, leads Peter, James, John and us down from the mountain. Like Abraham, Jesus invites them and leads them into the promise of the glimpsed future not only of his glory, but ultimately theirs, but only if they are willing to risk stepping out in faith, of letting go, changing, dying to what is in the hope of a promise to come.

This Second Sunday in Lent challenges us with the same call to change. St. Paul reminds us change involves struggle: “Bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God.” Yet, St. Paul also reminds us that we have the “strength that comes from God”, the Holy Spirit given us in our Baptism and sealed in Confirmation, the Spirit that filled and guided Jesus in his life ultimately leading him through the change of death into the glory of resurrected life. Last weekend I spoke about identity theft. This weekend we are called to voluntarily step forth in faith, like Abraham, and allow God to craft a new identity in us as we continue to live in the midst of the world. Our Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and service are meant to change us, helping us to see with new eyes, hear with new ears, act with new hands, love with new hearts—to become “complete”, “perfected”, living wholly in Christ. ***To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.*** We pray for the grace to let it be so.

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