

LENT SUNDAY II “A”

MARCH 7/8, 2020

Years ago while serving former Archbishop Daniel Kucera as his driver and liturgical master of ceremonies, we traveled to a small rural parish south of Dubuque. Upon arriving, the pastor met us at the front door of the rectory. His was a face, as the saying goes, had the map of Ireland written all over it.” It radiated gentleness, kindness and hospitality. A person’s face reveals the story of its bearer’s life; its racial and ethnic origins, its joys, sorrows, struggles, toils, dreams, age. Today, technology is able to provide us with “facial recognition” software. But, there is no substitute for a “face-to-face” encounter to get a “feel” for another person.

In today’s traditional Gospel story for the Second Sunday in Lent, the disciples Peter, James and John accompany Jesus up to the summit of Mt. Tabor. There they have a “face-to-face” encounter with Jesus that is, literally, out of this world. St. Matthew tells us that Jesus’ face “shone like the sun and his clothes became white as pure light”. Moses representing the tradition of the law and the covenant and Elijah representing the tradition of the prophets, both of whom were granted a vision of God, but only from behind, join Jesus in conversation. In Jesus’ face the disciples glimpse the truth of his divine nature, hidden until now, by his human nature, and hear the revelation that Jesus is the fulfillment of all that the law and the prophets foretold. Placed in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke following Jesus’ first prediction of his rejection by the religious elite of Jerusalem, and his passion and death by crucifixion, scripture commentators note that it was meant to offer a vision of hope in the face of all that would follow. The next time Jesus ascends a mountain it will be the mountain of Calvary. On Mount Calvary, John, Mary the mother of Jesus, and the other women will behold a face contorted with suffering, bruised, bloodied, and ultimately stilled by death and its colorless pallor. Following the resurrection, Jesus’ face will take on a variety of appearances revealing the truth that his countenance is now to be found dwelling through the person of the Holy Spirit within the hearts of those who put faith in him and whose own faces now are the means of his revelation in the world.

In his noon-time Angelus message on the liturgical feast day of the Transfiguration on August 6, 2017 Pope Francis stated: *The event of the Lord’s Transfiguration offers us a*

message of hope—thus shall we be, with him—it invites us to encounter Jesus, to be at the service of our brothers and sisters. ... The disciples' ascent up Mount Tabor leads us to reflect on the importance of disengaging from worldly matters, in order to make a journey toward heaven and to contemplate Jesus. It is a matter of being attentive to the careful and prayerful listening of Christ, the beloved Son of the Father, seeking intimate moments of prayer that allow for the docile and joyful welcoming of the Word of God. ... We are called to rediscover the peaceful and regenerative silence of meditating on the Gospel, of reading the Bible. I encourage all of us to make use of the daily Mass readings listed each week in the Bulletin and to spend at least a few minutes in quiet reading and silent reflection free from the distractions of our electronic devices in order to listen “with the ears of our heart” to Jesus who desires relationship with each of us.

The Holy Father continued: *At the end of the shining experience of the Transfiguration, the disciples came down the mountain with eyes and hearts transfigured by their encounter with the Lord. It is a journey we too can make. The ever more vibrant rediscovery of Jesus is not the aim in itself, but spurs us on to “come down the mountain”, energized by the power of the divine Spirit, so as to decide on new paths of conversion and to constantly witness to charity, as the law of daily life. Transformed by Christ's presence and by the ardour of his Word, we will be a concrete sign of the invigorating love of God for our brothers and sisters, especially for those who are suffering, for those who are lonely and neglected, for the sick and for the multitude of men and women who, in different parts of the world, are humiliated by injustice, abuse and violence.*

Beholding the glory of Christ's face along with the disciples today, may ours now also radiate his.

*8 March, 2020
Father Jim Secora*