Second Sunday of Lent – Cycle C

February 23/24, 2013

Gen. 15:5-12, 17-18; Phil 3: 17- 4: 1; Luke 9: 28b - 36

You may wonder why we hear the Gospel account of the Transfiguration at the beginning of Lent. It doesn’t really seem to have all that much to do with Lent, does it? Lent is meant to be a time of conversion, of repentance, of forgiveness, but here we are given the account of Jesus revealing his divinity and splendor to only three men: Peter, James and John.

Just three men, no more; certainly not to the entire world and not only that but those three men kept it to themselves. Jesus must have wanted it to be a private revelation for some reason.

So, why do we hear of the Transfiguration early in Lent, and why was Peter, James, and John to keep quiet about it?

The Church traditionally has believed that the Transfiguration occurred forty days before Good Friday, before the crucifixion. That is one reason why the Church gives us this reading early in Lent, about forty days before Good Friday. There is another reason, which I will get to later.

Peter, James, and John kept quiet about the Transfiguration, about their private mystical experience of Jesus’ divinity, for two reasons.

1. It was meant for them at that time because they were going to need to recall the Transfiguration in order to strengthen them and help them understand what the Crucifixion was all about when it happened, that death never has the last say on things, that although Jesus would die in the flesh, he remained the Son of God who came to give his life for the entire world and he lives forever as God and man.
2. The Transfiguration, as splendid, beautiful and miraculous as it was for Peter, James and John, even to the point where Peter didn’t want it ever to end but rather that tents be erected so they could stay there and never leave, this heavenly experience would be eclipsed by ***miracle of the Cross***.

Yes, even today we marvel at miracles, don’t we? When we read the Scriptures, we are enamored by miracles like the feeding of the five thousand, the raising of Lazarus, the healing of the lepers, the curing of the man born blind, changing the water into wine, and so many more. Yes we marvel at them and we sometimes pray for a miracle in our own lives, hoping God will give us some special grace or personal healing, or maybe some unique wisdom.

People flock to shrines and holy places around the world hoping to see a miracle, to be cured or relieved of some burden. They go to Lourdes, to the Holy Land and to Rome, hoping for something extraordinary.

These kinds of miracles are indeed wonderful and each of them are meant to bring us to a ***deeper faith in God and his mercy***. They are like “transfiguration moments” for those to whom God gives them, just like he did with Peter, James and John.

But the ***greatest miracle the world has ever seen, and will ever see is*** ***the Cross*** – the dying of the Lord Jesus to redeem us from sin and death. This, the greatest of all miracles, will never be repeated. It is the most wonderful of all miracles because it is given to all people from all times, to all men and women who have lived since the beginning of history and it extends to all people until the end of time. It is a miracle given to all men and women, not just a few.

This point was driven home to me while I was a student in Rome. All our final exams were oral exams done privately with the professor. In one class, Christology, Fr. Jean Galot, SJ, a French Jesuit asked me the question, “When was Abraham saved?” I was unable to answer his question. So he explained to me that Christ’s death on the Cross merited salvation for all mankind from the beginning of time until the end of time, that once Jesus died, time no longer bound him so the graces of his sacrifice on the Cross were effective in Abraham’s life some 3000 years before, and will be effective in the lives of men and women however many years in the future.

What Fr. Galot was trying to tell me was that the Cross of Christ is the miracle of human history.

Not only has the Cross impacted every human being who has ever lived or ever will live, it transforms all of creation.

Yes, all of creation. We will hear in the reading of the Passion how the earth shook, the sun was darkened and heaven itself was opened when Jesus died on the cross. Yes, creation itself was reordered and reclaimed.

My friends, we sometimes put more stock in our personal spiritual experiences that God allows us – our personal transfiguration moments – than we do in the Crucifixion. God may give us our personal revelations like he did for Peter, James and John, but he does so only to prepare us, to strengthen us for what lay ahead, for the times of trouble and trial in life, to prepare us to give witness and testimony to the death and resurrection of Jesus, just like he did with Peter, James and John.

God gave the entire world his Son Jesus, and his death on the Cross was and is a sign to all of us that God has renewed all things in Jesus’ death and resurrection. In Jesus all of humanity, all of creation is “recapitulated” as the ancient Church Fathers said, in other words, brought back to original dignity and purpose and order.

We hear of the Transfiguration early in Lent because it points us toward the Cross, it points us to redemption.

***There is the greatest of all miracles! Look at the Cross of Christ!*** See there the love of God outpoured! Look at the Cross with faith and you will see your salvation!