

# Archbishop Lori's Homily: 2nd Sunday in Lent

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Dear friends, we have gathered for Holy Mass on the Second Sunday of Lent when the Church focuses on the mystery of the Lord's Transfiguration. This scene of awesome glory may seem out of place in this penitential season; but in fact the Transfiguration is an essential part of our Lenten journey toward Easter. This morning I would like to discuss three connections between our Lenten journey and the mystery of the Transfiguration.

## **An Event of Prayer**

First is the link between the way Jesus prayed on Mt. Tabor and our resolve to pray more deeply in the season of Lent and far beyond. As he did so many times before, Jesus ascended a mountain, in this case, Mt. Tabor, and there was absorbed in prayer before his heavenly Father. Jesus prayed not merely with his lips but from the depths of his being as God's only Son who, through Mary, assumed our humanity, our human nature. While Jesus is at prayer, while contemplating the face of his Heavenly Father, the core of his being, his deepest identity becomes visible as Peter, James and John catch sight of Jesus was and is from all eternity. In that moment of intense prayer, Jesus allowed them to see his divinity, so that they would truly know him as Messiah and Lord, for it is in knowing Jesus through prayer that we begin to share in his divine glory.

That is why we too must climb the mountain of the Lord. How successfully we climb the Lord's mountain depends largely on our life of prayer. Thus, in Lent, we are challenged not merely to pray more but indeed to pray better; and the definition of "praying better" is to pray as Jesus did. So, let us aspire to pray like Jesus, not merely with our lips or emotions, but instead lay bare before the Father of mercies the depth of our being, our sinful and frail being that nonetheless has been reborn

by water and the Spirit. And how the Father loves us when we strive to pray deeply and when our prayer leads to conversion of life and the confession of our sins. Such prayer invites our Heavenly Father to restore in us the splendor of his grace, by enabling us to glimpse by faith the splendor of Jesus and even to touch the glorious Word of Life sacramentally. As our life of prayer deepens, the light of holiness becomes visible in and through us, the splendor of a genuine, inward holiness that shines forth what we say and do.

## **Understanding Scripture**

In Lent we are exhorted to read the Scriptures prayerfully and to take them to heart. So, a second connection between Lent and the Transfiguration has to do with how we read and understand the Scriptures. Notice who was with Jesus on the mountain: Moses and Elijah. And why were they with Jesus at the moment when his glory was revealed? Was it not to show that Christ is unifying center of all Scripture, both the Old and the New Testaments? On Mt. Horeb Moses received God's Law, his Commandments which would be completely fulfilled in Jesus' death and resurrection. For his part, Elijah represented all the prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah, our Redeemer. Indeed, while on Mt. Tabor, Jesus, Moses, and Elijah are speaking about the death he was soon to suffer in Jerusalem. Their testimony, in turn, was confirmed by God the Father, whose voice was heard on Mt. Tabor: "This is my chosen Son, listen to him!"

Here we glimpse the truth and beauty of the whole of Scripture which, with One Voice, speaks to us of the hidden designs of the Father's heart, his mysterious plan of creation and redemption. Here we have a key that unlocks for us the meaning of Sacred Scripture which is not merely a collection of writings from different centuries in differing styles. Rather, as we see Jesus standing with Moses and Elijah and hear the Father's voice, we perceive the essential unity of all Scripture. For in every passage, whether from the Old Testament or the New, Christ speaks to the whole Church, and to each of us, and to our hearts.

Our Lenten journey will proceed well if each day we reflect on Scripture. Like Peter we who wanted to linger atop Mt. Tabor with Jesus, Moses, & Elijah, so too, you and I should want to linger over the pages of Sacred Scripture. For when we read and

pray over the Scriptures and apply them to our lives, we, like the Apostles, are drawn into the presence of the Father. Overshadowed by the Holy Spirit whom we received in Baptism and Confirmation, we too can hear the Father say of Jesus: "This is my beloved Son, listen to him!" Let us beg for the obedience of faith so that God's Word may resonate in our hearts.

## **The Glory of the Cross**

A third connection between Lent and the Transfiguration is this: The link between the glory of the Transfiguration and the glory of the Cross. Just prior to the Transfiguration, Christ told his Apostles that he would suffer and die. However, the Apostle Peter, who had just confessed Jesus as the Son of the living God, recoiled at the thought that Jesus might suffer and die so shamefully. As we know, Jesus rebuked Peter for trying to stand in the way of his mission. Now, on Mt. Tabor, Jesus' identity as Messiah and Lord blazes forth as the glory of God shines on the face of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 4:6). In that instant, Jesus revealed his glory to the Apostles in order to show them that his death would lead the glory of the Resurrection, to the triumph over sin and death.

But let us probe this point a little deeper, for the Cross, despite its pain and humiliation, is itself glorious. In reality, the glory which the Apostles witnessed on Mt. Tabor is not just external; no, it is the utter oneness of Jesus' entire being with the Father's merciful love. Indeed, Jesus' glory consists, not merely in his dazzling appearance, but in fulfilling the plan of his heavenly Father to save us from our sins. Giving himself to the Father and to us - this is the glory of the Cross - a love stronger than sin and more powerful than death.

All that will soon unfold - the Last Supper, the Agony in the Garden, the way of the Cross, leading to his crucifixion and death - ...all this will express Jesus' unconditional "Yes" to the Father. In those decisive days, in the hour of salvation, Jesus' pierced humanity will be radiant with the glory of the Father's love as he lays down his life for our salvation.

Seeing Jesus, luminous in his oneness with Father's saving will, let us listen with greater intensity throughout the season of Lent to his words: "Whoever wishes to come after me, must deny himself, take up his Cross, and follow me! (Mt. 16:24).

Only when we take up our Cross, as Jesus embraced his, do we share in the oneness of Jesus with his Father's loving will. Only when we take up our Cross, whatever it might be— no matter how hard it might be to understand and to bear— do we become inwardly radiant with "the glory of God shining on the face of Christ." And then, from within the depths of our being, there will shine forth a self-giving love that will lead us and those around us to share in the glory of the Resurrection. Indeed, as this inward radiance overtakes us, God, in his goodness, begins the process of transforming from the inside out our lowly bodies that one day will also share the glory of the Resurrection.

Dear friends: May our Lenten journey lead us from sin to grace and from grace to glory - the glory of being one with Christ just as he is one with the heavenly Father! May God bless us and keep us always in His love!