

Second Sunday in Lent
March 17, 2019
Homily for the Anglican Usage Mass
of the
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
Scranton, PA
Luke 9:28b-36

When I preach on the Transfiguration, which we heard about this morning in our Gospel, I usually emphasize two elements. First, the Transfiguration of our Lord is a prefiguration of the glory yet to be revealed, that Jesus transfigured upon the holy mount appears to His disciples in His glorified state, as He appears after His resurrection from the dead. Second, I have talked about how this glorified state only occurs by and through carrying the weight of the cross, which Jesus discussed with Moses and Elijah, the exodus our Lord would accomplish at Jerusalem. That is, if we are to be glorified as Jesus is glorified, then we must also carry our cross, walk down off the mountain and offer ourselves in sacrifice, uniting our suffering with Jesus' own for the redemption of the world. Both these elements are true, but in light of the past week's events, I want to concentrate on a third aspect.

When we went on pilgrimage to Israel this past October, our journey led by Bishop Steven Lopes, we went up on Mt. Tabor, where the Transfiguration occurred, and we visited the beautiful church there. I was blessed to have been able to concelebrate Mass there, as well. Bishop Lopes preached about the Transfiguration, and what he said I want to share with you this morning.

The Transfiguration is indeed a prefiguration of the glory yet to be revealed, but it also certainly represents the transfiguration of Christ's Body, the Church, that occurs while we yet walk through this valley of tears. While it is true that our glorification will not be fully accomplished until the Last Day, a transfiguration of every Christian begins to occur as soon as we put on Christ. As we walk in the light of the New Man, we begin to reflect that light. As we are more closely configured to Christ, we appear more like Him. Indeed, our transfiguration begins now, and we must seek God's grace to open our eyes to see this reality, just as the eyes of the disciples were opened on Mt. Tabor. After all, Jesus' nature did not change between the Transfiguration and the Resurrection; He was always God. Instead, the disciples were simply able to better see the Lord in all His glory.

Therefore, what we have to recognize first is that a Transfiguration is occurring within our lives and the lives of all who have been baptized into the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If we are living in a state of grace and growing in holiness, we, too, are being transfigured. Our glorification is not complete, certainly, but we have begun to be conformed to Christ; we have begun the process of divinization, so we can see in the countenance of the faithful the grace of God shining through.

The stories of the saints help us to see this reality. If today were not Sunday, we would be observing the Feast of St. Patrick, a Christian from Great Britain, who was stolen from his native land by Irish slavers and taken to the Emerald Isle to have the fruit of his labor stolen from him. We know the story of his escape, how he boarded a ship and the cargo of dogs stopped barking, how he was removed from the ship and the barking resumed, how he was finally returned to Britain on that same ship, the dogs having been silenced after he re-boarded.

But more than this, we know how he returned to the land of his enslavement and successfully converted the very nation that had enslaved him. He did not fight with fire but fought fire with love.

St. Patrick is not famous and revered because he went back to Ireland so that he could enslave the people who had treated him shamefully. He is celebrated precisely because he sought to set the slavers free. How fitting then that St. Patrick is not only the patron of Ireland, but also of Nigeria, the land from whence came so many American slaves, the land that in her conversion to the True Faith has repudiated her slaving past and repented of her complicity in the Transatlantic slave trade. It is St. Patrick's love we celebrate, the love of God which frees us to love our enemies, a love so compelling our enemies are converted. Our transfiguration becomes theirs, grounded as it is in the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.

Contrast, then, St. Patrick's love with the terror attack we saw on Friday in New Zealand. The slaughter of the innocents in a house of prayer is what fighting fire with fire looks like, and it is repugnant. The loss of the Catholic Faith among the people of the West means that the power of God's grace to transfigure barbarians has been rejected. The patient endurance, the love that would lead a former slave to convert his captors, the humility that empowers us to forgive our persecutors, have all been exchanged for vengeance that seeks innocent blood as compensation for innocent lives lost. Jesus' love upon the altar of the cross was Christianity's answer to sin. A loss of the Faith among our peers means that increasingly we will see sin answered with more sin. To the degree that our population is not transfigured, our society will be transformed or, rather, deformed; and we will revert to the darkness that reigned before our ancestors were converted by Catholics like St. Patrick.

My point is that, absent a reconversion of the West to the Truth, things are going to get very ugly, very quickly. The newspapers will show themselves to be just as adept at killing as are the Muslim terrorists that the papers claim to be answering. We as Catholics will be witnesses to this cycle of violence, the slaughter of the innocents, this retaliatory terrorism, but we can have no part in it. We can have no part in the reversion from Grace that both Islam and the new paganism represent. We must recall both parties to Grace, for most Muslims and all the new pagans are descended from ancestors who were once Catholic. May the Transfiguration of our Lord be triumphant, and may the love of transfigured men like St. Patrick transform our broken and fallen world.