



Homily for 2/28/2021

2nd Sunday of Lent, Extraordinary Form Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV

The Gospel reveals to us a beautiful moment in the life of our Savior, the God-Man Jesus Christ. This moment is when we catch a glimpse of His Transcendent Nature as God in the Transfiguration, even as He retains His human form. God, who is pure spirit and invisible, makes Himself visible and accessible through the Human Nature of Jesus Christ. As human beings we are a body-soul composite. But we are broken. What before the fall was able to contemplate God now is disordered and falls into all sorts of idolatries because we have lost the balance of original creation. This truth is reflected in the Collect of today's Mass as we prayed:

“O God, who sees that we are destitute of all strength, preserve us both inwardly and outwardly, that our bodies may be protected from all adversities, and our souls purified from all evil thoughts.”

By God's Grace and the restoration He brings through the sacraments, we now are able to direct our bodies and souls to right worship of the true God. This is the work of sanctification. In addition to the restoration of right worship, this scene of the Transfiguration presents us also with the hope of what will become of us in Christ. Alongside Jesus also are our ancestors of the faith, Moses and Elijah, seemingly sharing in this same glow of transcendence as they are in communion with God. The Scriptures say that they were speaking with Him, meaning they were communing with God.

These are human beings who were brought into union with God through His mercy. We, too, share in this Mercy. In the Tract we sang, “Give glory to the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endures forever.” But we also sang, “Who shall declare the powers of the Lord? Who shall set forth all his praises?” The answer is that we are called to join Moses and Elijah and the whole witness of the saints in doing this. The presence of Moses and Elijah - besides the Biblical significance of the great lawgiver and the greatest of prophets who prefigure Jesus as the perfection of both - is also prefiguration of the glorified bodies of those who belong to the Body of Christ in the resurrection. We, who belong to Jesus in the flesh by our Baptism and Eucharist, and who share in His spirit through Confirmation, are also able to commune and converse with God by His gift of grace. This will be done not only in a spiritual way, but also in a bodily way. Not only will our souls be glorified, but also our bodies. This is the Divine Revelation which enlightens us about our own condition as human beings. But they are also challenging for us to hear. We are either tempted to despise the body and think only of the soul, as the pagans of old did, or we are tempted to indulge the body and forget the soul, as the pagans of today do. The esoteric religions that seek to liberate the soul from the body lead us astray. Likewise, the materialistic philosophies that undergird the secularity of our own age fail to see and appreciate a whole half of the constitution of human beings. There are so many challenges to a proper understanding of who we are as human beings that it seems fitting on this occasion to hear again the Church's clear teaching to us about our human nature. I present to you what the Catechism teaches:

CCC 362 “The human person, created in the image of God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual. The biblical account expresses this reality in symbolic language when it affirms that “then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” Man, whole and entire, is therefore willed by God.”

CCC 363 “In Sacred Scripture the term “soul” often refers to human life or the entire human person. But “soul” also refers to the innermost aspect of man, that which is of greatest value in him, that by which he is most especially in God's image: “soul” signifies the spiritual principle in man.”

CCC 364 “The human body shares in the dignity of “the image of God”: it is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit:



Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. Through his very bodily condition he sums up in himself the elements of the material world. Through him they are thus brought to their highest perfection and can raise their voice in praise freely given to the Creator. For this reason, man may not despise his bodily life. Rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honor since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day.

CCC 365 “The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the "form" of the body: i.e., it is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature.”

CCC 366 “The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God - it is not "produced" by the parents - and also that it is immortal: it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection.”

CCC 367 “Sometimes the soul is distinguished from the spirit: St. Paul for instance prays that God may sanctify his people "wholly", with "spirit and soul and body" kept sound and blameless at the Lord's coming. The Church teaches that this distinction does not introduce a duality into the soul. "Spirit" signifies that from creation man is ordered to a supernatural end and that his soul can gratuitously be raised beyond all it deserves to communion with God.

CCC 368 “The spiritual tradition of the Church also emphasizes the heart, in the biblical sense of the depths of one's being, where the person decides for or against God.

Because of original sin we get the balance between body and soul out of order and thus we become incapable of glorifying God as He desires. This imbalance causes us to fall into many idolatries. Thus, Lent is a period given to us each year to correct the broken understanding of who we are. Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said, “If you do not worship God, you worship something else, and nine times out of ten it will be yourself. You have a duty to worship God, not because He will be imperfect and unhappy if you do not, but because you will be imperfect and unhappy.” Lent is an opportunity to restore the balance and put us back into God’s will for our happiness.

We have to correct the disorders of our fallen human nature by ordering ourselves according to God’s revelation. The Transfiguration event orients us to the true end of humanity – unity with God through Jesus Christ. We will sing in the Preface that we give thanks to God who gives us the Lenten fast of the body to curb our vices, lift up our minds, and give us strength and reward. In effect it means when we mortify the body, we avoid being too attached to worldly things that easily turn into idols, and we train the ‘Heart’ that is the ‘soul’, to guide us to our supernatural end, namely God Himself. In the end, every penance, mortification, or fast is meant to train us to decide for God. May we choose true happiness and joy this Lenten season!

May Jesus Christ be praised!