

2nd Sunday of Lent “Moments of Transfiguration”

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When I was in college at the University of Washington, I spent most of my free time at the Catholic Newman Center. This was back before there was a church built there. We operated the Newman Center out of a large house, but we made it work just like we made operating a parish out of a barn work not too many years ago. At that point in my college days, I gravitated to the Newman Center, not because my parents made me go as I was living on my own by that time, but because I was searching for answers to questions like, what does God want me to do with my life? It seemed like an urgent question for me at the time because the University of Washington is expensive. If I wanted to stay on a four year track and graduate on time, I needed to settle on my major quickly. Therefore, prayer was required. The Newman Center was also attractive because I enjoyed being with other young people who shared similar values and experiences, a luxury in a place as big as the University of Washington.

The biggest event at the Newman Center each year was the annual Search Retreat. Are any of you familiar with that retreat? It is a wonderful retreat that is particularly helpful for young people in their late teens and early twenties, at a time in life when we are asking the really deep questions like: who am I, who is Jesus, and where am I going? The format of the retreat is to explore these three questions and make friendships along the way. After my first Search retreat, I didn't have all the answers, but I did feel God talking to me. God told me to stay close to the Newman Center. This resulted in becoming a guitarist for the choir the first year, a Peer Minister the next year, the president of the Newman Catholic Association the third year, and applying for seminary in my fourth year. Anyone who knew me, and knew how rambunctious I was back then will tell you, it was quite the transfiguration.

And we all have transfiguration moments, don't we? Whether it is connecting with God through nature, a moving retreat, or perhaps the transfiguring words of someone wise, perhaps it was a story from scripture, a parable from our Lord, or perhaps it was a special liturgy, we all have moments in our lives when we feel transfigured. Perhaps it was the first kiss when you were falling in love. Perhaps it was the first time you looked into the eyes of your newborn child. We all have transfiguration moments in life when God is present in that moment and you are never the same again.

My friends, this Sunday, God tells Abraham to travel with his son Isaac to a mountain of sacrifice. This is a disturbing reading because Abraham believed that God was requiring him to sacrifice his son. Back in the days of Abraham human sacrifice was a common activity among many pagan religions. In addition to testing Abraham's faith, the true God wanted to make a clear point to Abraham, that God does not require human sacrifice. In fact, something remarkably opposite happens. Instead of Abraham being required to procure a sacrifice, God provided Abraham with a ram. A ram is, of course, a sheep and this foreshadowed the Passover lamb of Exodus. The Passover lamb foreshadowed Jesus' sacrifice for us by becoming the Lamb of God who takes away the

sins of the world. The presence of the angel with the ram was a transfiguring moment in Abraham's life and for Christians later on who reflect on this story. The revelation is: it is not we who are to sacrifice animals and people to mollify a blood thirsty deity. It is our loving God rather who sacrifices himself for us and for the sake of our salvation.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus leads his disciples up a high mountain to witness his transfiguration. Elijah and Moses appear and this demonstrates that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophets and the law. God speaks from heaven and this gives the disciples clarity in their vocations. Peter wants to stay in the moment. Peter wants to build monuments and to stay put, and don't we all? Soon after the events at Mount Tabor, however, Jesus begins to lead his disciples to Jerusalem and to the cross. You see, Jesus leads his disciples to another mountain, Golgotha, where all of humanity is transfigured through the passion, death and resurrection of the Son of God. For Abraham, the undiscovered country seems to be a stretch of land that God would give to him and his descendants to fight over. For the disciples of Jesus, the undiscovered country is salvation, the promise of resurrection and everlasting life.

Lent therefore, it seems to me, is an opportunity for us to go on a retreat and to follow Jesus to that new country we all hope for by working on the areas of our lives that need changing and purification. Discipleship calls all of us to a lifetime of transfiguration. To do so, we need to take the time and meditate every so often on the deeper questions like: who am I, who is Jesus, and where am I going? I invite you to take a little time this week and reflect on these questions, perhaps write down your answers and look at them again in a few months to see if your answers have changed. A good starting point this week could be to recognize and remember the transfiguration moments in your life and to prayerfully discern why you had a transfiguration moment in the first place. Where was God leading you back then? Where is God leading you now?

This Sunday the Lord takes us up a mountainside so we can see the world around us from a higher perspective, with God's eyes. If we accompany Jesus up that mountain, over time we may notice a radical transfiguration at work in our own lives. As we make our way with Jesus from our Mount Tabors to our Good Fridays in life, we are invited to never lose sight of where Jesus is ultimately leading us. Our destination is our Easter hope. To get there, we need to know who we are, where we are going, and recommit ourselves to following Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life.