

2nd Sunday of Lent “The Transfiguration Moments of Life”

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When I was a student at the University of Washington, the biggest event at the Catholic 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. Thirty years later, I think back on those days and smile.

And we all have transfiguration moments, don't we? Whether it is a moving retreat, the transfiguring words of someone wise, a Sacrament you received like Baptism, Confirmation, or Marriage, or an encounter with the Lord in a powerful moment of prayer, 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 moments of transfiguration in life when God is present in that moment and you are never the same again.

My friends, Abraham has a profound moment in his life when his relationship with God is transfigured forever. God tells Abraham to travel with his son Isaac to a mountain of sacrifice. This is perhaps the most disturbing reading in the entire bible because Abraham believed that God was requiring him to sacrifice his son. Even worse, Abraham was ready to oblige. It is horrific to even imagine how a story like this could unfold. However, something remarkable happens in the moment of truth. Instead of Abraham being required to offer his son as a sacrifice, God provided Abraham with a ram. God providing Abraham a ram as a substitution for his son foreshadows Jesus' sacrifice for us by becoming the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The revelation is: God is less interested in our sacrifices to him and is more interested in sacrificing himself for us and for the sake of our salvation. This is profound beyond words when we sit with this and reflect on it, especially when we consider the implications this has when we receive the Holy Eucharist during Mass.

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 his passion, death and resurrection. For Abraham, the undiscovered country seems to be a stretch of land that God would give to him and his descendants. For the disciples of Jesus, the undiscovered country is our 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 God gave you that 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, 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 Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.