

THE TRANSFIGURATION

PREVIEW OF COMING ATTRACTIONS

2nd Sunday of Lent – Year A

Genesis 12:1-4a
Psalm 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22

2 Timothy 1:8b-10
Matthew 17:1-9

Being a movie buff I, like many other moviegoers, am always interested in the previews that come before the film begins. Many years ago I remember the excitement when the first preview of a new Star Wars film (episode one) was finally launched on the public. Fans went in droves, purchasing the tickets to the film in which the preview was featured. They packed the theaters, cheered when the appropriate logos, themes, names and slogans were uttered in the brief, two minute clip, only to exit the theater and return home when the preview was over. (No, many did not remain to watch the feature presentation.) The preview gave them a glimpse of what was to come, and enhanced their excitement over the release of the first Star Wars film in almost sixteen years!

Every year, on the second Sunday of Lent, the Gospel reading tells of Christ's own preview of coming attractions. Knowing what was coming – the cross and eventual resurrection – Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain to witness the Transfiguration. Jesus knew that the ordeals to come would shatter the faith of his disciples, even if only for a moment. So He gave three of them not only a brief glimpse of his glory, but also a reminder – in the appearance of Moses and Elijah – of what came before him in the Law and the Prophets.

For Peter, James and John this Transfiguration would prepare them for the scandal of the Passion, when these same three apostles would witness the arrest of



Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, before being condemned and ultimately crucified. While these apostles may not have understood everything at the time, they no doubt saw the connection when they saw Jesus in His resurrected glory. Therefore, Jesus instructed them *to remain silent about this until after He rose from the dead.*

For us too this reading is a preview of coming attractions. The Transfiguration is, for us, a foreshadowing of the celebration we are moving towards during this Lenten time of discipline, penance and sacrifice. We do not go through the season of Lent in a vacuum. Our sacrifices and observances,

The Transfiguration: Preview of Coming Attractions

both as individuals and as a community, are not done for their own sake.

By the time we hear this Gospel each year we are already week and a half into Lent; a time when our sacrifices and disciplines may already be proving difficult, if not a bit tiresome. We may already be looking for a loophole or two, or an exception to the 'rule', or perhaps have already taken a day or two off from the sacrifices we have committed to for whatever reasons we can think of to ease the strain that comes with religious exercise. The temptations that come with our spiritual disciplines, some of which can be challenging (such as fasting for a whole two days!) are not done without a purpose.

During this Lenten season we look to our ultimate celebration of the Resurrection at Easter, an event that is so central to our identity as Catholics that it takes us forty-plus days to prepare for and fifty days to celebrate. In the Transfiguration Jesus again gives us a preview of what is to come so that we might "hang in there" during the period

of Lent, with all the exercises and disciplines, designed to help us grow closer to God. Our Lenten practices help us keep our ultimate focus on the Resurrection, the light at the end of our forty-day retreat, the resurrection we will feel when, having hung in there for forty days (*plus* the Sundays) we join Christ in His Resurrection as we end our period of penance and sacrifice.

The story of the Transfiguration reminds us to remain strong in our Lenten disciplines (or hop to it if we have in any way been hesitant to get into the spirit of Lent this year). Let the Transfiguration be our Lenten preview of coming attractions; a preview that gives us the strength to faithfully carry on as we, through our Lenten observances, sacrifices and penances, prepare to celebrate the high holy days of Christ's Resurrection.

Fr. William Nicholas
Revised from a reflection in
The Catholic San Francisco
February 15, 2008