

LOST IN *TRANSFIGURATION*

2nd Sunday of Lent – Year C

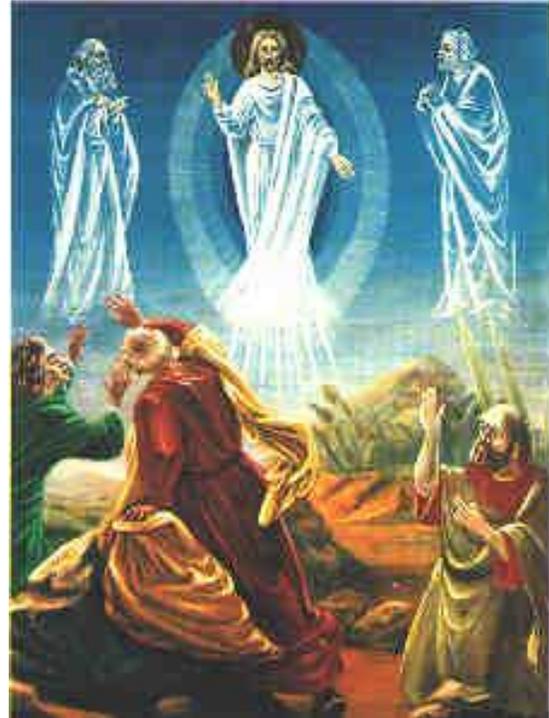
Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18
Psalm 27:1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14

Philippians 3:17-4:1
Luke 9:28-36

In J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings," one of the main characters is the mysterious Strider. He is a wild outdoorsman who is in fact, Aragorn, the last descendent of an ancient line of kings from the Land of Gondor who have long since abandoned the throne. Yet, to many of his companions and those who know him as the wild ranger, his identity is met with a great deal of skepticism. This ranger is a king?

As the first novel "The Fellowship of the Ring" draws to a close, as the small fellowship travels down the Great River, they pass through what is known as the Argonath, a monument of two colossal statues, pillars of the ancient kings of Gondor, ancestors of Strider and symbols of his heritage and identity. As the boats pass between the great statues, the hobbit Frodo observes Strider, whose appearance has changed dramatically. As they passed between the giant images, Frodo no longer saw the wild ranger of the north; before him in the boat sat Aragorn the king, the descendent of the great kings who was destined to reclaim the throne of Gondor. From that point in the epic, Strider's place and portrayal in the story is told through the lens of his identity as king, of which Frodo saw but a brief glimpse as they passed between the Argonath; an identity that is finally realized in the final novel, appropriately titled "The Return of the King."

In the Gospel of the Second week of Lent we hear of another transformation. This one is centered upon the person and identity of Jesus. On the mountain Peter, James and John see a brief Transfiguration



of Jesus, but not the simple, plain-speaking teacher, a carpenter from Nazareth. They see before them the divine Messiah, the fulfillment of the hopes of Israel, standing between Moses and Elijah, the two great pillars of the Law and the Prophets. Over them all is heard the voice of the Father – "This is my chosen Son. Listen to him." Like Frodo, when he looked upon Strider's transformation, Peter, James and John are overcome with awe at the Transfiguration, an image that stays with them as they continue to follow Jesus.

It does not end there, however. St. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Philippians (3:17-4:1), the second reading, that all of us are much more than our lowly bodies. As moviegoers prepared to see Mel Gibson's new film "The Passion of

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the Christ,” many wondered how Mr. Gibson would incorporate Christ’s divinity into the violent portrayal of His Crucifixion. As people of faith, however, we already know how to look beyond the bloodied figure of Christ on the Cross to the divine Messiah crucified for our salvation. We have seen that divinity in and through the Transfiguration. That is the lens through which we must observe Christ’s ministry, that is the lens through which we must observe Christ Crucified. Just as the centurion looked upon His broken body on the Cross and realized “*truly this man was the Son of God,*” so too must we superimpose the image of the Transfiguration on all stages of Christ’s life and ministry.

In Christ we see the fulfillment of the covenant made with Abraham in the first reading from Genesis (15:5-12, 17-18), and for the rest of the Gospel, we are to

Christ has destined us to share in the same Transfiguration ... when we too will be transfigured after the pattern of Christ.

view Christ through the lens of the Transfiguration, especially when His ministry reaches its tragic but triumphant summit. As we gaze upon the Cross of Christ throughout the season of Lent, as we look to the bloody corpse of our Crucified Messiah, we see in that image, the true glorification of Christ the Lord, beyond which lies the glory of our Messiah, transfigured before our eyes, the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets represented in the pillars of Moses and Elijah. Over the image of the Cross we continue to hear the voice of the Father –

“*This is my chosen Son. Listen to him.*” It is through the lens of the Transfiguration that we no longer see the broken body of Jesus, but the glorified triumph of the Savior.

Fr. William Nicholas
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