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Columns
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The Transfiguration, depicted on the ceiling of the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul in Providence, R.I. (Wikimedia Commons/Farragutful)



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Last week, we watched the very human Jesus in conflict with the powers of evil. This week, we see his glory as Son of God. In both cases, Jesus exhibits the epitome of what humanity is created to be. We are creatures who can, and therefore must, decide if we are going to participate in God's all-loving plan for the world or seek satisfaction in what can never fulfill us and usually harms others and creation.

The story of God and Abraham begins with the invitation to wonder at the immensity of God's grand plans for humankind. "Look at the stars! They are nothing compared to what I want to give you!"

For Abraham, the sign that God was fulfilling the promise came through descendants and a homeland. But these were only a symbol of God's desire to give. All of creation is the ground on which humanity is invited to join in the unity that is God.

Today, we hear Luke's version of the Transfiguration. Matthew and Mark tell the same story, each with their own emphases. While all three evangelists recount the experience on the mountain, Luke places it in the context of prayer, saying that, while praying, Jesus' whole appearance changed. In prayer, Jesus appeared as who he truly was and manifested how, through his relationship with the Father, he participated in the glory of God.

Second Sunday of Lent

March 16, 2025

Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18
Psalm 27
Philippians 3:17-4:1
Luke 9:28b-36

This revelation felt like the culmination of all that the disciples needed to know about Jesus. They saw Jesus with Moses, who represented the law and covenant, and with Elijah, who symbolized the prophetic tradition that continually called the people to behave in ways that moved them more deeply into being God's own.

For Peter, that was all they would ever need to see. He was ready to set up tents so that they could dwell joyfully in that presence forever.

Then, a cloud came over them, a cloud representing the haziness of what they thought they knew, the incompleteness of what their eyes, minds and hearts were able to take in. From that cloud came an echo of what the heavenly voice proclaimed at Jesus' baptism (Luke 3:21-22): "This is my chosen Son, listen to him."

The command, "Listen," defined their role as disciples. After Jesus returned to his normal appearance, they spent the night together on the mountain and then returned to a world full of need for faith and healing.

Paul's message to the Philippians puts a particular focus on both of the other readings. God told Abraham, "Look at the heavens." Paul says: "Our citizenship is in heaven." Paul sees Abraham's land of promise as a foretaste of eternal life in union with God and all creation. Paul believed that everything was involved in a process of becoming, a process of slowly evolving into more than just an image of God but into total union in and with God (Romans 8:22).

Paul goes on to teach that we, too, will be transformed and share Christ's glorified existence: unlimited in space, time, with the ability to receive all in love, and, most importantly, sharing Christ's union with and in God. For Paul, transfiguration is the destiny of everything.

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Jesus led the disciples down the mountain because these teachings are not just nice theories. The disciples descended from their ecstatic experience into a hurting world. They needed to remember that God's promise to Abraham wasn't fulfilled in an instant, but rather through a long pilgrimage that involved both him and his descendants.

Paul warns his readers to not allow their own desires to become their god. He exhorts them to stand firm, imitating people whose lives manifest what it means to be Gospel people. Just as we and they are in the process of growing in union with God, like them, we are also responsible to carry on Jesus' mission in our own world of hurt.

The transfiguration was not just a personal experience for Jesus, nor simply something to astound the disciples. The transfiguration is the overture to the resurrection of the firstborn of creation. And the firstborn is just that, the initial instance of where everything is going in God's good time.

The disciples who witnessed the Transfiguration and Resurrection slowly grasped the fact that those experiences portrayed their own destiny, the fulfillment of life in God.

In these first two weeks of Lent, we've begun a new stage of our Holy Year pilgrimage. We've seen human frailty and the glory of what humanity can become. The temptations initiated Jesus' journey to the passion and resurrection, the definitive revelation that evil possesses no lasting power.

The Transfiguration bids us to enjoy resurrection life, the glory that is and is to come. Christ welcomes us to join him on the journey of bringing healing and hope to our hurting world.

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