**Lent II, 2025**

It’s the Second Sunday of Lent, and that means we read the Transfiguration as our Gospel today. If you want the historical reason why, it’s because the West didn’t have a separate feast for the Transfiguration until perhaps as late as the ninth century, and not everywhere in the Western Church until the fifteenth, so the Second Sunday of Lent did duty for it, bearing witness to this mystery of Our Lord’s Life.

If you want the *ritual* reason why, then we should turn to S. Luke’s Gospel just before the passage we’ve just heard: “[Jesus] said to all, ‘If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” It’s no accident that, when Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus on the mountain, they are talking “of his departure,” – the Greek word is Exodus – “which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”

The Lord is setting His face towards the holy city, where He knows that His Passion and Death await Him. And He invites His disciples to do likewise, because they must bear witness to His death on the Cross, so as to be present to testify to His Resurrection. And all of that is a hard teaching, so now Peter and John and James are led up the mountain to witness the Lord’s Transfiguration – “they saw His glory” – and to be encouraged for the trials that are to come.

He had said to them all, a couple of verses before, “whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes *in His glory*,” and so it’s appropriate that they should know that’s not an idle threat: they’re given a glimpse, a foretaste, of the glory of God’s Christ, and that for two reasons.

First, of course, it sets the seal on what Jesus has been saying: the Son of Man really is coming in His glory – *this* glory that you have now seen. That is why Moses and Elijah are there, to confirm that Jesus’ ministry really is the fulfilment of the Law – given to Moses – and the Prophets, of whom Elijah is foremost. That’s why the voice of the Father ratifies Jesus’ teaching, “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to Him!”

All of that is important, but there’s more at work today, as we start really to get into the stride of our Lenten disciplines. Perhaps we’ve had some success; perhaps we’ve been discouraged by setbacks; perhaps we’ve had both, even on the same day. Like the disciples, we’re asked to do something difficult, and like them, we need some encouragement. So the Church shows us what Jesus showed them: His glory, “the appearance of His face […] altered, and His clothing […] dazzling white […] they saw His glory.”

This is more than just saying ‘I know the going’s tough now, but there’s a reward at the end,’ although it is that, too. There’s a mystery involved, which is the Mystery of the Holy Cross.

I can’t put this better than S. Thomas does:

“Now, in order that anyone go straight along a road he must have some knowledge of the end […] Above all is this necessary when the road is hard and rough, the going is heavy, but the end is delightful. Now, by His Passion Christ achieved glory, not only of His soul …] but also of His body. […] To which glory He brings those who follow the footsteps of His Passion.”

We mustn’t think of the Cross just as something unpleasant but unfortunately necessary, which Christ was good enough to take on for us, so that His Father would relent and let us into heaven. The Cross is transformative, Christ having transformed human suffering into a means of glorification. “[T]hrough many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

This way of thinking – the logic of the Cross – is alien to the world, to which suffering is only ever a calamity to be avoided. So far we can say with S. Paul that they “walk as enemies of the Cross of Christ,” precisely because they refuse the offer of redemptive suffering, suffering which leads to glory: “Their end is destruction, their God is their belly, *and they glory in their shame*, with minds set on earthly things.”

Contrariwise, “*our* citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who will *transform* our lowly body to be like His *glorious* Body.” That, if you like, is the ‘prize’: nothing less than being made like the Son of God in His Glory, the glory “as of the only Begotten Son from the Father.”

But only through the Cross. In that sermon before the Transfiguration, Jesus tells His disciples, “whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it.” In other words, we are invited into glory only through death: bodily death, yes, but also death-in-life, ‘dying’ to the world and its false promise of comfort and security, and living to God, even though that will mean pain.

In our first reading God takes Abram outside and says to him, “Look towards heaven.” That’s good advice. Because as we tread the hard, rough road of Lent, and more than that, when we walk the rough path of this earthly life, we ned to remember where we’re going. So take this as Lenten comfort today: when the Cross seems heavy and the future bleak, with Abraham “Look towards heaven,” with S. Paul “stand firm in the Lord,” and listening to the voice of God’s Son, His “Chosen One,” “take up [your] Cross” and follow Him.