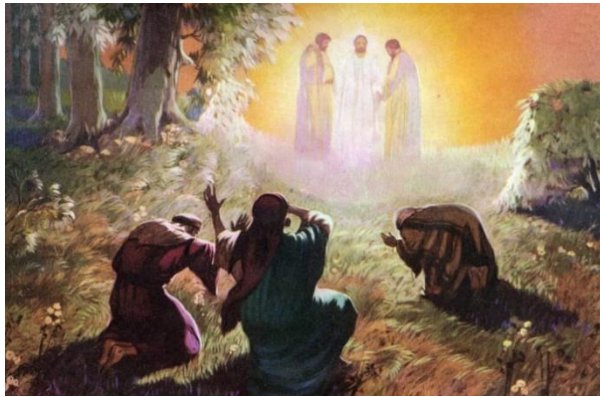


Homily – March 16th, 2025 – Second Sunday of Lent



We all need conversion; that's a given. Lent is given to us as a gift to ponder what conversion looks like in each of our lives, what it looks like for the Church, and what it might look like for the world. One of the most important conversions

Pope Francis says the world needs is an ecological conversion. Ecological conversion is a change in how we look at, interact and behave, to care for our common home—the earth. It is a transformation of hearts, minds, attitudes, and behaviors towards greater love of God, each other, and creation. True conversion is not about altering the surface, prettying it up to make it look more presentable. It's more like a complete overhaul. When we have experienced it, it shakes us to the core, makes us re-evaluate our priorities, and we can never go back to our old way of seeing, thinking, and acting. Conversion takes effort, discipline, and sacrifice, but is never accomplished without the grace of God.

Today's gospel story, about the transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor, is one I've heard many times, but it's the first time I see it as a call to conversion. A little context. It starts with, ***"Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray."*** This is a redacted, shortened version. The original text says, ***"Now eight days after saying this,*** Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up the mountain to pray." What happened eight days prior, and why is it important?

Eight days before, Jesus was at prayer. Before Jesus acts, he always prays. Jesus came out of prayer, that day, and asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” As you recall, Peter gave the brilliant answer, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God” (Lk. 9:20). And Jesus says, “Don’t tell anyone,” much like he says at the end of the Transfiguration story.

Peter got the right answer, that Jesus was the Christ, but he didn’t fully understand it. Jesus wants that truth to deepen in Peter before he goes blabbing it to the whole world. Peter still needs to be converted by this truth that he just spoke. Jesus is certainly the Christ; that’s the revelation. But it’s not the path to the revelation. As soon as Jesus tells Peter that being the Christ involves going to Jerusalem and suffering, and that being his follower will involve sacrifice, Peter immediately regrets the answer he gave. Peter, like most of us, is fine with the revelation, but he is not fine with walking the path of the revelation. Peter wants to turn “You are the Christ” into a slogan, a rallying cry, a bumper sticker. You’ve all seen similar bumper stickers, I’m sure. Unfortunately, words are cheap. Jesus tells us that anyone can say, “Lord, Lord” (Mt. 7:21). Even the devil can quote Scripture as we heard him do in last Sunday’s gospel when he said, “It is written in Scripture that the Angels will protect you so that you will not hurt your foot against a stone” (Lk. 4:10-11). That’s probably the bumper sticker the devil has on his Tesla.

So, eight days before the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, Peter has his bumper sticker, his sound bite, his slogan “You are the Christ” but not much more. On the mountain Peter says, ***“Let’s make three dwelling, one for you, Jesus, one for***

Moses and one for Elijah.” Now, instead of a bumper sticker, Peter seems to be into “shrine-building.” He hasn’t advanced very much. Conversion hasn’t run very deep in him. There’s still no embracing the Cross, Jesus’ path, the lifestyle of a follower of Jesus.

Neither the simple proclamation of Jesus’ lordship nor the building of programs, structures, piety, and shrines is the kind of world into which Jesus is drawing his disciples. It is the voice from the cloud ***“This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”*** that calls us to conversion and leads us to authentic lives, resurrected lives, abundant lives.

Here’s a little story I borrowed from Fr. Richard Rohr that makes the point. He writes, ***“There is a story that an artesian well had sprung up in the middle of the desert, and it was a marvelous well with clear, nourishing, and copious water. People began to come and to drink and to celebrate their wonderful discovery of a well in the desert. Gradually they built a building over the well. They walled it off. They developed ceremonies to celebrate their good fortune of finding an oasis in the desert. They wrote official versions of how it was discovered. They spun fantastic tales about the effects of the water. But the water, actually, over the next few months, had ceased to flow. But hardly anyone noticed that the water wasn’t flowing anymore, that it begun to diminish and finally it went away. They were so busy building and maintaining the super structure. The water took itself over and burrowed a new channel in the desert, which was just as good, clear and nourishing and life-giving in a totally new and unexpected place. A new group of people found it there and they were also refreshed. But***

the old group of people just kept telling the story back at the old well, kept maintaining the wall, kept maintaining the building over the well, and actually forgot to realize that the water wasn't there anymore." He continues, ***"I don't think most of our people are accessing the well. And because some of them never drank from the well, they don't even know they are missing it. And we just keep maintaining the wall around the well, the building over the well, the stories about the well, singing songs of people who once drank at the well, all the while falsely thinking we have the water."***

I think what happened on the Mountain of Transfiguration was a sustaining glimpse of the resurrection of Jesus. It was given to Peter, James, and John to sustain them as they went down the mountain and confronted all kinds of darkness, including front row seats to Jesus' suffering and crucifixion. While it was a sustaining glimpse, I think it was also a foretaste of heaven itself. We pray that heaven would push into earth so as to transform this world of ours each time we say, "May your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Heaven is not just a question of the afterlife. It begins here, and all peoples have a human right to a foretaste of what heaven means—justice, equality, a fair standard of living, mercy. Bumper stickers and shrines cannot get us there; only hearts open to conversion and God's grace can.

~Fr. Phil