

## Second Sunday of Lent, February 25, 2018

Genesis 22:1-2, 9A, 10-13, 15-18; Psalms 116:10, 15-19; Romans 8:31B-34; Mark 9:2-10

by Marie Kenyon



In the Gospel reading for the Second Sunday of Lent, the scripture demonstrates Jesus' divine nature through the narrative of the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-10). We hear the mountaintop scene in which Jesus suddenly appears to James, John, and Peter in a whole new way: "And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them," (Mark 9: 2-3). The Apostles see Jesus conversing with Elijah and Moses. Finally, a cloud appears and a voice from the cloud tells them that "This is my beloved son. Listen to him," (Mark 9:7) Abruptly, the cloud and the vision of the prophets disappear and the Apostles were left alone only with the Jesus they knew standing before them.

This event allowed James, John, and Peter to see there was a lot more to their leader and teacher, Jesus, than they had originally perceived. Who the Apostles encountered was not the tired, hungry and tempted Jesus we heard about in last week's Gospel. Nor can we say that the transfigured Jesus manifested the ordinary human dimensions that were so visible during his daily encounters with people. The same Jesus who walked in the streets, who sat and ate with the sick, broken and sinners of society, is now in the company of two of the great prophets, Elijah and Moses. The contrast between the earthly Jesus and God's "beloved Son" could not be stronger. Yet we know, in faith, that in his humanity and in his divinity, Jesus continues to attract and draw us closer to him and his message: "It is good that we are here" (Mark 9:5).

We see Jesus transfigured from a human being with frailties into our divine Lord and Savior. Not only does this remind followers that Jesus is the Son of God, but on a deeper level, the Gospel is showing us an example of how to live as people. Despite our humanity, there is a divine element or grace within those who accept Jesus' message of love, faith, and hope. We can say that because of God's grace in us, each one of us reflects an inherent human dignity that transcends human agency.

This central tenet of God's grace is a crucial guide for Catholics as it teaches us how to live and relate to our world. The work of abolishing the death penalty, for example, seeks to end a practice in which the fallible and imperfect overtakes the divine in each person. As people of faith and goodwill, we can recognize that no matter how broken and sinful our lives may become, the light of grace can be a source of new life. The temptation to take life into our hands, through the practice of the death penalty or any other form of destructive violence, can never be an authentic form of societal renewal and transformation.

Only by drawing close to Jesus and listening to what he tells us can we hope to be transformed and redeemed. Indeed, in the story of the Transfiguration, we are reminded of the power of God's grace in our human lives. The story not only shows us how Jesus' humanity is transfigured but also teaches us that, in Jesus, each one of us can be changed and renewed.

*Marie Kenyon is the Director of the Peace & Justice Commission for the Archdiocese of St Louis. She previously had been the Managing Attorney for the Catholic Legal Assistance Ministry.*

