

Homily for March 13, 2nd Sunday of Lent

Last year I read a comment about the Feast of the Transfiguration, which is on August the sixth. The Feast of the Transfiguration is forty days before the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, which is on the fourteenth of September.

That number – forty days – drew my attention. It seems there are two speculations about when the Transfiguration took place.

The First is based on Peter's suggestion on the mountain that they build three tents. Perhaps this would have come to mind because it was during a yearly observance called the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles, which means "tents"). If that were the case, the Transfiguration took place around September or October. In which case it is interesting that our liturgical celebration in August is so close to that time of year.

The Second theory of when the Transfiguration took place I have seen in several recent articles. Though none of them quote sources, they say that the Transfiguration has traditionally been understood to have occurred forty days before Jesus' Crucifixion. It is from this mountaintop that Our Lord sets His face toward Jerusalem.

If this is the case, it helps me understand the placement of the reading of the Transfiguration every year on the Second Sunday of Lent. I always thought that it would have made more sense on the Fourth Sunday of Lent – Laetare Sunday. That is the day in which the vestments are Rose-colored in order to mark we are now in the last half of Lent. It is a little bit of glory in a penitential season.

But by tradition, it would make sense liturgically to see the Transfiguration as being toward the beginning of the forty days of Lent, right after the First Sunday, when we reflected on Christ's forty days in the desert.

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It has been noted in literature that the Transfiguration stands out as the only Miracle Our Lord Performed on Himself during His Ministry. And it is the only time He permitted His divine glory to shine through His humanity. This event anticipates not only His cross, but the glory of the Resurrection.

As Moses is one of the two figures who appear and speak to Christ, one Scripture Scholar listed several ways the Transfiguration links what God did in the Exodus and what God does at the Easter Event – in His Passion and Resurrection:

1. *The Exodus of Moses was a liberation from slavery; in the same way the death and resurrection of Jesus liberates us from the forces of sin and death that enslave us.*
2. *The Exodus of Moses began with a sacrifice in which the blood of a lamb brought salvation to the Hebrew people whose homes were marked with it; in the same way the blood of Jesus brings salvation to all who are washed in it (baptism) for eternity.*
3. *The Exodus of Moses involved the Passover meal; Jesus will establish a new Passover meal in His own body and blood at the Last Supper.*
4. *The Exodus of Moses led the people to Mount Sinai where they received the Law of God and entered into a Covenant with the Lord; Jesus is the very Word of God incarnate and will establish the new and eternal covenant in His blood on the cross of Calvary and offer us a share in it through the Eucharist.*
5. *The Exodus led the people into the promised land; Jesus will lead us through His death, resurrection, and ascension to our heavenly homeland with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for eternity.*
6. *[And Finally], It was the experience of the Exodus that formed the Hebrew people into the People of God and taught them obedience to the Lord; the Exodus of Jesus is what forms us as the New People of God through the waters of Baptism, and our Lord's example of faithful obedience to the Father's will becomes our model for Christian discipleship.*

The scholar concludes this list by saying: “All these similarities, and others, show us how the Exodus of Jesus far surpasses that of Moses. Now we can understand why Jesus desires so strongly to advance toward Jerusalem where He will accomplish these great graces for the salvation of the world. The Transfiguration gives us a privileged insight into the meaning of our Lord's paschal mystery so that we can desire to participate in His Exodus.”

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My brothers and sisters, that participation in His exodus is also a participation in His transfiguration. In the New Catholic Encyclopedia, the article on the transfiguration includes the following insight:

“In the Salvation History of humanity, the Transfiguration is a prophetic sign, an apocalyptic event, that points to the future transfiguration of all Christians in Christ. Its mystery is also the mystery of the Christian’s transfiguration – of the increasing hold of the Holy Spirit upon [us], incarnate spirits, and through [us], upon the entire universe. By the sacramental encounter with the Person of the Risen Lord, the Christian participates in the mystery of the death-Resurrection of the firstborn of every creature - the mystery prefigured by that Transfiguration. A Christian is a person called in the present to be always and ever increasingly transfigured by the action of the Spirit...”

That last sentence is worth repeating: “A Christian is a person called in the present to be always and ever increasingly transfigured by the action of the Spirit.”

My Brothers and sisters, this ever-increasing transfiguration of ourselves in Christ is our hope. It is the vision that encourages us in our Lenten walk, and our entire earthly pilgrimage.