

Last Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B, 2009
The Rev. Ronald N. Johnson

Today is the Last Sunday after the Epiphany, the final Sunday before the beginning of Lent.

Every year, on this Sunday, we read the story of the Transfiguration. We read it twice a year, in fact, once on the Feast of the Transfiguration and again on the Last Sunday after the Epiphany. We read it today because it is the appropriate way to end the Epiphany season and start Lent. Lent is traditionally a season of fasting, of introspection, of searching the soul, shining the light of faith into the dark spots, seeking forgiveness, seeking cleansing, seeking to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Easter Christ. Lent, above all things, acknowledges our imperfections. Lent reminds us that we are not worthy of God's consideration, but he bestows his grace on us anyway because that is the way of God - unconditional love, unmerited grace, salvation by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Lent keeps things in balance. Done right, Lent keeps us from ever getting such a big head as to think that God owes us. On the contrary, we owe God.

As we are about to begin the journey of Lent, it helps us to have a glimpse of the outcome. The outcome of Lent is Easter. The other side of death is Resurrection. In the chronology of the life of Christ, our Lord's Lent was in the days running up to the Cross. Sustaining him was the knowledge that he was the Father's Son. The story of the Transfiguration is the story of that revelation. It tells us that in a transitory moment, just for a brief instance, Jesus was in the "immediate present" just as he would be in Easter - the Risen Messiah.

The Transfiguration was God the Father's gift to Jesus, but it was equally a gift for the disciples, Peter, John and James. God revealed to them the Christ of Easter and the revelation became the sustenance that carried them through the difficult days ahead. It carried them just as their Easter experience carried them through their apostolic ministry.

What we cannot fail to note is that the Transfiguration story is finite, not infinite. Easter is infinite, but the Transfiguration was a momentary glimpse of Easter. Peter, James, John and Jesus came down from the mountain; they came away from that theophany, that experience of the presence and revelation of God. They went into the valley and began the Lenten journey to Calvary and crucifixion, sustained on the way by memory of the Transfiguration.

Let me suggest to you that as a people of faith we can experience our own moments of transfiguration. We experience those moments in faith when we know ourselves as God knows us, humbled yet accepted without qualification, broken yet whole in God's healing love for us, fallen yet redeemed by the grace of the Risen Lord. These are moments not so much of insight as revealed sight, glimpses of redemption that tell us that we have our place at the banquet table of God, members of the family, forgiven and loved beyond

measure. These are the "aha's" of faith, flashes of future brilliance in the momentary darkness of the soul, the promise of life in Christ. *Amen*