

Second Sunday of Lent  
March 17, 2019  
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## Reflection

On Friday we were saddened to hear about another massacre. A gunman in New Zealand killed 49 Muslims worshipping at two different mosques. There was at least one bright spot, at least one act of heroism. After the gunman began firing, a fellow named Abdul Aziz chased him back to his car. He dodged the bullets that were fired at him, picked up the emptied rifle, and used it to break the window of gunman's car. The gunman fled and was later caught. Abdul Aziz is credited as a hero who saved many lives. He acted on autopilot, without thought or fear, but with the belief "that Allah didn't think it was his time to die." He acted with courage.<sup>1</sup>

Courage is one of the four cardinal virtues (1808). The others include moderation, prudence and justice. These virtues are listed in Scripture (Wis 8:7). But God lets all people grow in moral virtue through human effort: education, deliberate acts and perseverance (1804, 1810). So these virtues were identified by the Greek philosopher Plato, and were adopted the Stoics in Rome. According to the catechism, courage or "fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life.

Gen 15:5-12, 17-18  
Ps 27  
Phil 3:17-4:1  
Lk 9:28-36

The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions. It disposes one even to renounce and sacrifice his life in defense of a just cause (1808).<sup>1</sup> Over time, we might learn more about how Abdul Aziz acquired his moral courage. Today's Gospel shows how the apostles received something a little different - spiritual courage.

Why did they need spiritual courage? After Peter confessed his faith, "Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you (Mt 16:21-22).'" Peter didn't accept or understand the prediction of Jesus (554). So Jesus brought them up Mount Tabor, showed his glory, and revealed his cross. The law and prophets announced his sufferings, through Moses and Elijah, which Jesus would accept in obedience to the Father. On Mount Tabor, "The whole Trinity appeared: the Father in the voice; the Son in the man; the Spirit in the shining cloud (St. Thomas Aquinas, 555)." The Transfiguration gave a foretaste of the death and resurrection of Jesus; it gave a preview of persecution and glory for the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/new-zealand-mosque-attack-survivor-1.5059407>

The Transfiguration gave the apostles stronger faith and spiritual courage (568).

This spiritual courage permits the Church to evangelize; to bring the good news to all the nations. And this is the will of God, since he "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4)." The first reading reminds us of the universal destination of the truth that saves, the countless numbers in the covenant of Abram that was given through faith (ref LG 16): "Look toward heaven and count the stars...so shall your descendants be. And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness."

Today is the Second Sunday in Lent, so the Memorial of St. Patrick is suppressed. But St. Patrick relied on spiritual courage as well. Born in Wales as the Roman Empire waned, he was carried off to Ireland as a slave. You can imagine the "deep and terrifying darkness [that] descended upon him." But the experience honed his faith, and with faith he was no longer afraid. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" He made his escape, but that wasn't the end of the story. He heard "'the voice of Irish' saying 'Boy, come and walk among us once more! (Confession, 23).'" It was a call from God to leave his hard-won home. He was ordained on the continent and then spent 30 years converting Ireland. Here's what he said: "Regardless of danger I must make known the gift of God and everlasting consolation; without fear and frankly I must spread everywhere the name of God (Confession, 14)."

For this Eucharist, we pray for religious communities facing persecution, for the conversion of Ireland, and for Chris Smith of this parish who is there with NET Ministries; that spiritual courage might strengthen us to follow the word of God: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"