

Second Sunday in Lent
March 8, 2020
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Reflection

In today's Gospel, we hear that Elijah appeared to the disciples beside a glorified Jesus: "Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking to him." Elijah had countered 450 worshippers of Ba'al on Mount Carmel. Christians gathered on Mount Carmel in the early 1200s to found a new order: the Carmelites. In the centuries that followed, a number of saints embraced their charism of contemplation, seeking mystical union with God through prayer. St. Teresa of Avila was a Carmelite nun in the 1500s. She established a new convent according to the primitive rule. Unlike most convents, they refused a fixed income. Instead, they sought poverty to achieve reliance on God. This gave detachment from worldly wealth, humility to behold and welcome God's gifts, and love for God and neighbour. She faced serious opposition, both within the order and without. But she persevered with confidence that she was doing the will of God. These actions did pull her from prayer, with its consolations and visions. But they also fueled the fires of her love, which she expressed in prayer. Her example illustrates the effects of the Transfiguration on the Church. Considering her example in the light of the Gospel lets us receive these effects into our own lives.

Gen 12:1-4
Ps 33
2 Tim 1:8b-10
Mt 17:1-9

It says in the Gospel that "Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves." Do you remember last week's Gospel? Satan took Jesus to a high mountain and offered him authority over the world. Jesus refused out of obedience and love for the Father, and exorcised the devil from his presence. "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Now Jesus received the blessing of God the Father. "His face shone like the sun...and a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased: listen to him!'" Refusing Satan, accepting the mantle of the Suffering Servant, walking towards the Cross: God honoured these actions and bestowed his authority upon Jesus in the sight of his disciples. This authority extended past Satan's promised rule over squabbling nations and jealous kings. It encompasses all of time and space, visible and invisible; what was, what is, what will be. This conferral confirmed the confession of Peter: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (Mt 16:16)." It also strengthened the courage of the apostles for their ministry; bolstered once more by the words of Jesus: "Get up and do not be afraid." St. Teresa received courage from Jesus as well. She suffered terrible physical ailments early in her life, as well as spiritual assaults by demons.

These prepared her for the persecution that she would endure when founding her new convent. This is what she wrote: "When I was in this terrible state of exhaustion - for at that time I had not yet had a single vision - these words alone were sufficient to remove it and give me complete tranquility: 'Be not afraid, daughter, for it is I and I will not forsake thee: fear not.'" About this consolation, she wrote "Oh, what a good Lord! What a powerful Lord! He gives not only counsel but solace. His words are deeds. She how he strengthens our faith, and how our love increases! (Life, 25, p 164)." The Transfiguration affected the disciples in a similar way.

But wait. We remember the Cross, where their courage failed. Yes, John remained; supported perhaps by the Virgin Mary. She brings all of us to Jesus...especially when we don't want to go. But at the last supper, Peter had boasted, "I will lay down my life for you (Jn 13:37)." He denied Jesus three times. And where was James? The Sons of Thunder had answered "We are able" when Jesus asked them: "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am to be baptized (Mk 10:38-39)?"

Jesus did give them courage; a vision they would recall and share at the prompting of the Holy Spirit: "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." The terrors of the trial, the crushing crash of the cross, three long days of fear, regret and loss: too much for human courage to endure. But Jesus gave them courage.

Easter hope, a green blade piercing the sudden thaw, brightened by the sun, casting its shadow on retreating snow, heralding life; longing and leaping.

With the Resurrection they remembered: "he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white." Our help and our shield: he died, but is risen; he "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." And at Pentecost, their courage flared: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified... So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls (Acts 2:36,41)." Did the disciples seem different? This is the work of the Holy Spirit. St. Teresa explains: "Even so is the soul transformed into another, with its fresh desires and its great fortitude. It seems not to be the same as before, but begins to walk in the way of the Lord with a new purity (Life, 39, p 289)."

For this Eucharist, we thank God for the courage given to the saints, and pray to receive the same courage in our own vocations.