

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

St. Matthew 17:1-9

Our society makes the claim that a person can be whoever they decide to be. It also makes the claim that we are entitled to whatever we want, whenever we want, and however we want because, as so many television adverts tell us, “you’re worth it.” Anyone who denies this is accused of hatred, violence, elitism, and of not being “inclusive”. This arises from modern society’s obsession with entitlement. The idea that whatever I want should come at no cost. Sadly, it is not only a false idea but a dangerous one, the consequences of which we see all around us.

The Transfiguration of Our Lord shows to us that there is no glory without sacrifice, there is no life without death, there is no resurrection without the crucifixion. We are created by God both physically and spiritually—we are body and soul and that is what defines us as human beings. We are placed in a physical world which, by definition, has limitations. We cannot be whoever we decide to be because we are created within a particular set of circumstances, and it is within this circumstances that we find holiness and so the fulfilment of our humanity.

Today we are told that the fulfilment of our humanity is something we can have and should have in this life. I should not have to sacrifice or bear any limitations to who or what I decide I am as a person. But we are in this life for maybe 80, 90 or 100 years, and often less than that. If the fulfilment of my humanity lies within that short span of time then there is nothing that remains for me in the life to come. I have said that I use this world to define who I am and so I have no need of the world to come. But to live this way is to miss the whole point of the Transfiguration of Christ.

For a moment, the eternal glory of God shone forth on that mountain top and the divine glory that is Christ's shone forth through him. But He did not cling to that glory but returned from that mountain top to daily life. In that moment he showed what would come after his suffering and death—the fulfilment that would be His. The three apostles with Him—Peter, James and John—wanted to hold on to that glory because they did not understand that that glory would come because of the Lord's passion and death. Christ showed to them all that would be, but they must descend from that mountain top to the dust and mire of their daily lives. Because that is the path they must tread, as we all must, if we are to be granted the fulfilment of ourselves.

It is not a punishment imposed on us by God, but the means by which we are forged into saints. The athlete trains his body to run faster, jump higher and to be stronger. The musician practices for years to be able to be able to understand and appreciate the most intricate pieces of music. The explorer sets out and crosses oceans and deserts to find the world that lies beyond what he knows. We must do the same if we are to ever find who we were created to be. Not who we claim to be, but who we were created to be. Only then will we find the fulfillment of who we are.