

2nd SUNDAY OF LENT - B – 2006
“Following the Way of Love”

Last week, it was the desert; this week, the mountain. Last week it was Satan, and this week the Father. Last week, Jesus was beset with temptations; this week he is in his glory. Last week was shrouded in darkness, this week is flooded in radiant light. What a study in contrasts. Why does the Church give us these two scenes back to back at the beginning of Lent each year? Some say the Transfiguration is recalled on this second Sunday of Lent because an old tradition says it happened 40 days before Good Friday, but nobody knows for sure. I prefer to think there is another reason.

Many years ago, when I was stationed in Bellingham, a man who walked to work stopped by the church each morning during Lent to say the Stations of the Cross. I must say, I was impressed by his faith and devotion. *“What a great Lenten practice,”* I thought to myself. Well, Easter came with all of its joy and happiness. And then on Easter Monday, the day after Easter, much to my surprise, that same man stopped by the church to say the Stations of the Cross! Had he missed it? Hadn't he heard the news? Jesus had risen! Death was swallowed up in victory! The tomb was empty and this guy was still on his way to Calvary. The story of love does not end in suffering. It ends in life!

On Ash Wednesday, I suggested that whatever we choose to do or not do during Lent, it should help us follow Jesus. We don't give up candy so we can say how good we were when Lent is over, but so we can get in the practice of saying no to ourselves; so we can be more aware of the needs of others. To follow Jesus means we must go where Jesus went. And Jesus went wherever love took him. If that meant the Cross, so be it. And believe me, the way of love is the way of the cross.

There is no doubt in my mind that as soon as we choose to love someone, that love will bring us joy and sorrow. You married couples know this far better than I. You know the joys. But you also know the sorrows, and dread that day when one of you dies. And you know it is coming. And the pain you will feel is because you love your spouse so much. The only way we can protect ourselves from such pain is to decide not to love anybody, but that would be to deny our human nature. It would be a life not worth living. Made in the image of God, we are made to love and receive love.

I recall a friend who said to her mother after having her first baby, *“Mom, you never told me.”* Puzzled by the remark, the mother said, *“I never told you what?”* *“You never told me how much I would love my baby.”* You know your kids bring you your greatest joys, and you know they have the potential to bring you your greatest sorrows. A time will come when they will want to resist your love, if not reject your love. When those times come, know that Jesus felt the same pains. *“As he looked over Jerusalem near the end of his ministry, he said, “All I wanted to do was to gather you like a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you wouldn’t let me.”* And the gospel adds, *“and Jesus wept.”*

But that is not the end of the story. Jesus continued to love his people, even when he heard them yell *“Barabbas,”* and *“Crucify him.”* Love never ends because love never had a beginning. It is the most fundamental reality there is. God is love. And love conquers all.

Jesus had just told the disciples about his coming passion and death, and it bewildered them. They didn’t know what to think. Would all be lost? Would it mean the end of all their dreams? How could a Messiah suffer? Why would a Messiah suffer? To what end? And then, on the mountain, before their eyes, Jesus is transfigured, and becomes dazzling white, divine-

like. The mystified disciples get another clue as to identity of this one they hoped to be the Messiah. He wasn't just about suffering. He was about life and joy and victory over darkness. Unlike the voice that had spoken to Jesus at his baptism and identified him as a "beloved son," this time it speaks to Peter, James and John, and says, "*Listen to him.*" In effect saying,

You don't understand now, but in time you will. Listen to him when he washes your feet, identifies himself with bread and wine, and says, "Father forgive them." Listen, it will make sense when you see the dawning of a new day, the victory of light over darkness, good over evil and life over death. Now, go down the mountain and follow Jesus, wherever love takes you.

My brothers and sisters, Jesus is trying to show us the way to deal with the trials, joys and sorrows of life. He wants the best for us, even more than any mother for her child or husband for his wife. There is a time for recommitting ourselves to the way of the cross, to the way of love. That is what Lent is for. But it doesn't end in suffering. Through every struggle, there can be victory and new life when we approach it with love.

Sometimes I wonder if I am too idealistic, that I dream too much. Then I hear Paul's words to the Romans today.

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him? . . . It is God who acquits us . . . Jesus Christ who intercedes for us.

When I hear these words, I realize that my dreams are still too small. I don't dream enough. And to think that we are about to offer ourselves with Jesus to the Father in the Eucharist, only to receive Jesus into our hearts in Holy Communion. And to think, this is our Faith, not a dream.