

2nd Sunday in Lent cycle C

Most everyone here, I imagine, knows what it's like to have to pack up everything and move. As my soon to be brother priests and I wrapped up our last weeks and days of classes and activities, preparing ourselves for ordination and first Masses and first assignments and saying good-bye to the life we had known for the past four or more years, I was consumed less with sentimentality than with a logistical problem: I had no car that last semester—my insurance company found out that I was living in New York and threatened to drop my coverage if I took my car there again (they found out about it because of claims, yes, plural, I had to file while in New York—and so I had no means of moving my belongings back home. I had to figure out what was the easiest, cheapest, most convenient overall way of sending back the winter clothes I had kept there, the many books I told myself I would refer to over the years; and yeah, the boom box, records and tapes, and a few other “luxury” items I had on hand. I decided that rather than try to squeeze things into some other guy's already crammed vehicle, I would UPS my stuff ahead. And so, with a couple of weeks left before my exodus from the seminary, I packed up all that I wanted to take except for what few belongings I absolutely needed. I spent the last weeks in a room so sparsely furnished that it barely looked inhabited; what I kept could be packed in a matter of minutes. Although it had never been a fancy apartment, my room had been cozy and comfortable; it had been home for four years, but there at the end, it didn't seem like home anymore. Each day I spent there was a stark reminder that it was time to move on. Dunwoody, as it was nicknamed, would be home no more, would be home never again, and in a sense, in that bare room, was home no longer. I was soon to make what at that point seemed like the biggest exodus of my life.

In this week's Gospel, the telling of the Transfiguration, we hear of how Moses and Elijah appeared in glory on the mountain with Jesus; and they spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. The word exodus means departure; but it implies more than a mere move to a new home. I had moved several times in my life, but leaving Dunwoody was an exodus of sorts: I was faced with leaving behind some of my best friends, not that I'd never see or hear from them again, I still do, with regularity; but I knew that they would never be a part of my day to day life again. I knew I was leaving behind a daily routine, and a weekly routine: after ordinations, no more “one Mass at 9:00 on Sunday and then upstairs to read the Sunday paper for a couple of hours.” No more view of the Palisade mountains across the river and of the George Washington bridge. I was on my way to a life I had been looking forward to for so long, and had been preparing for, for so long, and yet at the same time I was leaving behind a life that I had to admit I had come to really, really enjoy. It wasn't just a departure from a place; it was a departure from life as I had known it. Moses, of course, knew from an exodus; he was the instrumental leader of the biggest exodus of them all. He knew from experience that leaving behind a life, a lifestyle, meant to be properly prepared: the packing was all done before the Israelites partook of that last meal before leaving Egypt, they were ready to go. Moses knew that it meant self-denial during the time of travel, and he knew that it could mean a temptation to look back, rather than forward. But he also knew that it meant trusting in God: trusting that with God's help they would gain possession of a promised land; trusting that God would not only bring them through the desert, but that the promised land would end up being everything, well, that it was promised to be. It was part leaving behind, part gaining possession of something greater.

And so, Jesus' suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension was a sort of “exodus” from Jerusalem; and Moses and Elijah spoke about this move with Jesus when he appeared in his transfigured glory there upon the mountain. The transfiguration was a foretaste of the glory that Jesus knew he would be coming into; but his was still an exodus, a saying “good-bye” to what he had come to know during his thirty-three years in and around Galilee. He knew that he was dying in order to bring to salvation to the very people he loved, and yet, he would never know them in

the way that he did here on earth. He knew that everything was going to be better, that the net result would be an incomparable gain; but nonetheless, it required trust in the Father's plan. It meant preparation for the journey, and so he spent all those months teaching his disciples, calling some of them to become apostles; demonstrating his power as God so that many would come to faith, instructing us about the Father, about how God is love; he established his Church, to hand on his truths to each successive generation. I am sure that he loved the life he had here, but his life was pointed towards something else; it was pointed towards that glory that Peter and John got to see for just a brief moment there on the mountain.

The transfiguration is, as I said, a foretaste of the glory which awaited Jesus. But more than that, it is a promise to us, that this is what awaits us one day, if we too will make an exodus from this life to a better life, one which we cannot even imagine, but which we trust in, because God has promised it. And so especially during this season of Lent, we set ourselves to properly disposing of our things here on earth. Not tossing everything into the trash, and not giving it all away; but depriving ourselves of some of it, for a time, so that we always remember that they belong to the life we know here, not to the life which we will know forever in heaven. Lent also means pointing ourselves in the right direction, so that when the time for our departure arrives, we're going to where we say we want to go; and so it is a time of repentance, of contrition, and of sorrow for our sins.

In the first reading from the book of Genesis, we heard a passage about Abraham, our father in faith. Abraham, too, was called to leave the land of his fathers, and trust that God would give him something more, something better if Abraham would trust; and trust he did, and it was credited to him as righteousness; indeed, it was the right thing to do, to listen and to trust in God, and so he has served as our example ever since. Each exodus—Abraham's, the Israelite's, Jesus', and our own—begins with a leap of faith. Looking back now, I see that the biggest "move" in my life was not one of hauling all of my possessions across half a continent, but came when I made my profession of faith: that moment was the one that changed my life, and had an effect on my life that would be profound. I didn't know it at the time, but that move would redefine my whole life: my surroundings, my friends, my like's work. Faith does that; it takes us in a particular direction. On this second Sunday of Lent, we meditate on the Transfiguration, an event which reminds us of the heavenly glory which awaited Jesus, and which awaits all those who are part of his Mystical Body, when one day our bodies will be raised like his in glory. But first, Jesus had to leave the earthly Jerusalem as a necessary means to bring about the heavenly Jerusalem. Now, during Lent, we prepare for our eventual departure, which for most of us here is many, many years away; but nonetheless, because we don't know when exactly we will be called to leave, we therefore must act as a people called: called to live in accord with God's revelation, called as a people ready to go at a moment's notice, called to live as a people of faith and trust, who believe in all of God's promises. Saint Paul reminds us that our citizenship is in heaven, and that God will one day change our lowly bodies to conform with his glorified body. If we come to love something, someone, some place, then leaving is rarely easy. But for us, life has to be about the exodus. Because we know that, through the power of the cross, through the power of Jesus' resurrection, we are called to leave behind what is good, for what is far better; called to leave behind this life, for glory in a life to come.

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