

## REFLECTION FOR 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT 2016

The readings for this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent abound with rich themes and meditation-worthy thoughts of **covenant, faith, conversion, faithfulness** and **light**. In my mind, they all work together and point us to community and God's mysterious, extravagant, transforming love.

In Genesis we hear that ***“Abram put his faith in God”*** ... and ***“God made a covenant with him.”***

In the letter to the Philippians we are told to ***“join with others in imitating those who follow God's ways”*** Philippians also tells us to ***“stand firm in the Lord.”***

The Gospel story we have all heard many times ... twice a year - every year. Briefly: Jesus took Peter, John and James and went up the mountain to pray. While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white. Wisdom figures, Moses and Elijah, came to join transfigured Jesus. Peter reacted saying: ***“It is good that we are here.”*** God spoke from a cloud and said: ***“This is my Beloved Son; listen to him.”***

I was first struck by Peter in this story. Peter, guileless, impulsive Peter. I often feel like him. He didn't always have it together ... and neither do I. Peter often gets censured for his overzealousness and stumbling words and actions, but I have to tell you that it was his words, said in all good-hearted sincerity and naivety, that first jumped out at me as I reflected on this Sunday's Gospel. ***“It is good that we are here.”*** Those words touched my heart, more this year than ever before.

***“It is good that we are here”*** so that we may journey together through another Lenten opportunity to grow - with one another - in seeking God and deepening our faith. I know that would not happen for me as well anywhere else. When I was in Texas for months - we went to

church every week ... sometimes several times a week, as part of the St. Faustina congregation, which is made up of friendly, welcoming, good people of faith. The liturgies were lively; the ministers carried out their ministries well; the priest drew the congregation into his engaging homilies; the people actively participated. But what my heart missed during all that time was the day in and day out being in a faith-filled community of women who strive to live what they hear in the Gospels each day in real, ordinary and down-to-earth ways. There is a profound richness in the daily simplicity and challenges of rubbing shoulders with a group of sincere, good-hearted people who are all here for the same reason ... ***“Join others in imitating those who follow God’s ways,”*** the letter to the Philippians tells us. I need all of you to walk with me every day to help me ***“stand firm in the Lord”*** and grow in conversion of heart. ***“It is good that we are here!”***

This Sunday’s Gospel reminds us that we are called to live with open, listening hearts that enable us to be soul-touched and heart-changed by God’s love each day. You all know that recently my parents experienced their own personal “transfiguration” when they were called home to see the glory of God. I talk to them every day and ask them what it is like to be where they are now. Of course, I can’t know that ... none of us can know that ... until we have let God’s transforming love work in us little by little through the years, deepening in our hearts, smoothing the rough edges of our interactions with one another and expanding our vision and capacity to love - until someday, we, too, are called to see the fullness of God’s glory.

Again, that could not happen for me without all of you to support, encourage, challenge and walk with me along the way. That’s the beauty and the power of community.

***“Jesus went up the mountain to pray. While he was praying his face changed in appearance.”*** We cannot seek God in community and remain the same. Like bits of shifting sand, our faithfulness to

daily prayer brings about slow, subtle changes in our inner awareness. Our wisdom figures teach us. Our peers challenge us. Those who hurt us, with or without malice, make us dig deep into our inner resources to discover our forgiving hearts. When I get annoyed, I need to go deep within to find patience and understanding so that God's amazing love can begin to shine through me - and I can see God's light in you as well. When I first came to community, you taught me what it means to live and be with others. You showed me what it means to be a caring, loving person of faith. You welcomed me into your traditions, encouraged me to use my talents, taught me how to pray. You showed me the face of God, and little by little I changed and grew to reflect what I saw in you.

***"This is my Beloved Son,"*** we hear in the Gospel. We, also - all of us - are God's beloved ... and God's transforming love can do powerful things in us. It doesn't happen right away. We are not ready to see or know the fullness of God's glory yet. The readings of this Sunday hint at that with a contrast of darkness and light ... In the first reading, Abram fell into a trance and was enveloped with darkness before God made a covenant with him. In the Gospel, Peter, John and James were overcome with sleep and did not actually see Jesus transfiguring, but saw his shining appearance when they woke up. Then a cloud overshadowed them, frightened them, as a voice spoke to them from the cloud. This mysterious encounter changed them, left them awestruck and silent from seeing what their minds could not quite grasp. They came down the mountain different because, without understanding it, they had experienced just a glimpse of the glory of God. For us, it is not that dramatic; the darkness that keeps us from fully seeing God's glory does not come from outside us, but while we are striving to live faithfully each day, what keeps us from God - even good people like us - lets us know that becoming more Christ-like takes a life-time of spiritual work.

***"This is my Son ... listen to him,"*** the Gospel says. ***"Listen,"*** the Rule of Benedict says. As Benedictines we are called by our vow of

conversion to turn to God each day, to listen, to be still and let God work within us. The events of the past several months have changed me, made me more reflective, more appreciative of my need for others, more aware and sensitive to other's pain and my need to grow in community. I find myself now needing more time to listen to my heart and let it catch up with my head in

trying to make sense of what has transpired in my life in the past several months. I need to listen more to recognize God making a covenant of love with me as with Abram, as with all of you.

This Sunday's gospel speaks of **light and glory**

One of my most treasured mementoes from my mother was the note she had written to me and Carol and left on her windowsill for us to find. The last part of the note said, "*May you stay healthy and happy so I can see the light in your eyes.*" The light of Christ calls us to grow in being more Christ-like, grow in serving others, grow in doing what is needed for the good of all, grow in being all that we are meant to be as people of faith. The light of Christ calls us to be happy, to be at ease with ourselves and gentle with others, to find satisfaction in what we do, in where we are, in how we live, so we can reflect to others the inner joy that comes from truly believing that we are deeply God-loved.

**Covenant, faith, conversion, faithfulness, light, community and God's extravagant transforming love** - these are what I find in the readings for this Sunday. Theologians say that this Sunday's Gospel - the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain top foreshadows his greater transfiguration to come - his rising from the dead. Our own "transfiguration"

will come when God has dispelled our inner darkness and deems us ready to see the face of God in all its glory.

Until that time - aware that Jesus did not go up the mountain alone, but took companions with him - let us companion one another on our

journey, continuing to ***stand firm in the Lord, imitating those who follow God's ways.*** Let us climb our mountains of everyday life, listening to the voice of God. Let us live with open hearts and make room for God's transforming love to enable us to be light for others, always remembering - ***It is good for us to be here*** to walk the cross of love together.