

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The 2nd Sunday of Lent
February 28, 2021

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The event called the Transfiguration marks the turning point in the Lord's ministry. He had been preaching and healing throughout Galilee. But now Jesus will turn towards Jerusalem and the Cross. And we can wonder what Peter, James, and John were thinking as their silent Friend and Master led them up Mount Tabor. They could not know they would fail Him on another mount, called Olivet. The Apostles did not know the journey with their Master would lead to a garden called Gethsemane, and that they would scatter and then deny Him. It is more likely they were still thinking of the Kingdom of Heaven in terms of political power and influence.

There had been *another* silent mountain climb in Israel's history. In the annals of Jewish salvation history it was a much-loved incident. Abraham had taken his son Isaac to Mount Moriah (which is believed to be the temple mount in Jerusalem.) It is no coincidence Holy Mother Church gives us *Genesis 22* as a lesson at Mass on *the same Sunday* as the account of the Transfiguration.

On Mt Moriah, after an initial question from young Isaac, and Abraham's answer "God would provide everything for the sacrifice", Holy Scripture adds "So they went both of them together." Perhaps Peter, James, and John, recalled the *Genesis* account as they silently climbed Mt Tabor behind the Lord Jesus. Poor little Isaac knew nothing of the terrible things God sometimes asks of the people who love Him. *But Abraham knew*. Only later did the Apostles recall the dreadful significance of what their Master was doing. *But Jesus knew*. Yes indeed, "God would provide everything needed for the sacrifice". No wonder both the patriarch Abraham and God's Own Son were silent as they trudged up the hill with their innocent but trusting and loving companions.

The Lord had already warned His followers: "The Son of Man must suffer many things." But that idea had not been well received. So patiently Christ had the inner circle of friends trudge up the mountain, so many centuries after Abraham had obeyed the call of the Lord. It was on the mountain that Jesus desired His closest followers grasp, once and for all, what He was about, and why He had formed them into a group of disciples.

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Words fail to fully describe the Transfiguration. But we are obliged to use words! Peter, James and John used words we later call *Holy Scriptures*. We call them that because God is in them, and because God is in them the things they describe ring true in our souls. When lives are lived in conformity to the gracious sovereignty of Jesus Christ, we see marvels of conversion, generosity in unexplainable places, sacrificial service to others, and submissions to God's will we might otherwise not recognize or think possible. The Transfiguration was not a once-only, and sorry-if-you-missed-it experience! For His inner group of friends the *same Lord Jesus* can still be wonderfully transfigured as He was that day on Mt Tabor.

That glory of Christ's Presence can break through in His Sacraments. The invitation to walk with the Lord can come at any time. It is usually unexpected and, by us, unplanned. Our prayer must be when the invitation *does* come we will have grace to respond. We pray for that because the Gospels also tell stories of *missed opportunities* to go with the Lord.

"So they went both of them together." That phrase once described Abraham and Isaac. Later it was expanded to include Peter, James, and John with Jesus. And we have the gospel account of their experience. But the Gospel is not the story about *other* people. Our Gracious Master has provided the way for you and me to go with Him.

Then, after that happens, (and remembering the glory of special moments), we will nevertheless have to return to serving Christ in the world. Like Peter and the rest, we will find satisfaction in the remainder of our days, knowing that Christ is also encountered in our fidelity and conformity to His will *each and every day*. But we will never again call any day *ordinary* after having once experienced the glory of the Lord.