

HOMILY

The Second Sunday of Lent *February 17, 2008*

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Many of us have had them...those times when we felt like we were on top of the world, really happy. The moment might have come at some exciting event in your life—graduation, baptism, your first kiss, your first day on your first job, your wedding, the birth of a child, even catching your very first fish. Or it might have been something of a smaller, quieter nature—like a very intimate conversation with your father or mother when you felt that they honestly understood what you were saying and why you felt the way you did. We call these *mountaintop experiences*. And oh how we hate to come down off that mountain. We want to hang on to that moment for as long as we can. *"Let's just stay right here and let the rest of the world go by for a while."*

In the Gospel reading for today, we hear Matthew give his version of the event which we call *"The Transfiguration of Jesus."* It's one of those rare moments we were just talking about. One of those mountaintop experiences of life. For Jesus, it was a time of confirmation and affirmation of his ministry. For Peter, James and John, it was a brief glimpse of the transcendent, a peek at the reality that lies just beyond everyday life.

But notice, Jesus quickly led his Disciples back down off that mountaintop, in spite of Peter's desire to pitch a tent and camp there a long while. Jesus led them back into the daily routine of teaching, preaching, and caring for the broken and the hurting people of the world they lived in. Jesus led them back to the reality of life in the valley.

And that leads us to another question: Just what is reality anyway and who defines it? Is reality just a concept? Is the mountaintop experience itself the ultimate reality with its air of celebration and glimpses of glory? Or is reality the messy muddling of everyday life? Is it the promise of salvation where every tear will be wiped away? Or is it the fears and tears that you and I encounter every single day we live? What is reality in the Church? Is it our prayer and hymns of worship, our professions of faith, and our hope of heaven some day? Or is it our acts of kindness, words of encouragement, and other ordinary expressions of our faith on ordinary days like today?

I remember reading somewhere that reality is where Jesus and human beings come into contact. I like that. I wish I could remember who wrote it so I could give them proper credit. *Reality is where Jesus and human beings come into contact.* And what does that mean?

To use the imagery of Paul, that's when you and I turn to Jesus, allowing him to be our model and guide. We begin to see life more clearly. The veil that prevents us from seeing life clearly in our self-contained agendas is taken away and our vision of reality comes into sharper focus. There's going to be a little fuzziness around the edges, but if we want to get a clearer image of the reality of life, we would do well to look to Jesus.

And when we look to Jesus, what do we find? On the one hand, we find a Jesus who takes us up to those dizzying heights of the mountaintop as well as those intense moments in the hospital ER or when we fall in love or when we feel that we are forgiven.

That same Jesus who leads us to those spiritual high places also leads us to care for the hurting and the broken-hearted; to minister to the homeless; to bind up the wounds of a broken world or simply to attend to the needs of a brother or sister. Jesus is there in the fears and tears of everyday life. Jesus is there in the joy of the birth of a child. Jesus is there in the aching loneliness of the shut-in. Jesus is there at the repeated failures of his followers. And he is there at our successes, too.

Reality is where Jesus and human beings come into contact. As we look closely, we discover that Jesus not only encountered human beings in the extraordinary and in the routine, but he repeatedly led them where they had not expected—and often did not want—to go!

“Behold, I make all things new,” Jesus said. And suddenly, the ages-old prejudices against Samaritan or children or women or any race or nation no longer make any sense, if they ever did. *“Behold, I make all things new,”* Jesus says, and suddenly all our wonderful plans to earn our way into the Kingdom of God are swept away with the promise of grace, with the power of the cross and the offer of salvation as a free gift.

Reality is where Jesus and human beings come into contact. Wherever that is, wherever it may lead, you can be sure that love is there. *“God is love,”* remember. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only son.”* *“Love one another as I have loved you.”* Love is the heart of reality.

Whether we meet on the mountaintop or in the valley, the truth is, you and I are truly loved. That’s what happens where there is contact between Jesus and a human being. Whether it’s up on a mountaintop, in the ordinariness of everyday life, or down in the lowest valley, whether in crucifixion or resurrection, reality is where Jesus and human beings come into contact. In your pain or your joy, in your grief or your celebrations, in your visionary hopes or the grind of ordinary life, Jesus is there in love; and living in his love, you and I become real. That, my friends, is the ultimate reality.