FATHER GARY PENNINGS

PASTOR'S CORNER

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

On this Second Sunday of Lent, the Church presents us with the Gospel that depicts the events that took place when Jesus was "transfigured" in the presence of his apostles: Peter, James, and John.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "transfigure" as: "to give a new and typically exalted or spiritual appearance." In the Gospel account, Jesus' appearance changes; his face began to radiate light "like the sun" and his clothing became "white as light." The glory of his divine nature began to show through his human nature. It is as if the curtain between heaven and earth was momentarily drawn back, and the glory of heaven began to shine through Jesus. The presence of Moses, who represented the Jewish law, and the prophet Elijah, who represented the Jewish prophetic tradition, conversing with Jesus, revealed that Jesus was the fulfillment of Judaism.

So, what was the purpose of this miraculous revelation? Why did Jesus want Peter, James, and John, his closest disciples, to be there to experience it? The Gospel passage itself hints at the answer. Jesus knew that his disciples would soon undergo an immense challenge to their courage and to their faith. The apostles and other disciples were still wrestling with the great mystery of God's plan of salvation unfolding through Jesus. His impending passion and death would likely stir up doubt or confusion. Without divine help the disciples risked slipping into despair.

The divine vision that Peter, James, and John witnessed atop the mount of transfiguration would be a great help in giving them hope, even in the midst of the immense challenges and grief they would soon face. Peter experienced a slice of heaven atop that mountain, and he didn't want to leave. He said, "it is good that we are here." And indeed, it was!

Peter's faith was bolstered by that hope-filled experience. For the rest of us, we rely on the virtue of hope to sustain us in the midst of doubt or grief. Hope is the virtue by which we desire the things of heaven as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. Hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every person, desires that can only be fully satisfied in God alone. Do you have genuine hope in God's promise?

Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life,

Fr. Gary