

## **SYNOPSIS OF HOMILY ON LENT II SUNDAY (MARCH 1) MARK 9: 2-10(L/15)**

**Introduction:** The common theme of today's readings is metamorphosis or transformation. The readings invite us to cooperate with the grace of God with the assistance of the Holy Spirit to transform our lives by renewing them during Lent and to radiate the grace of the transfigured Lord around us by our Spirit-filled lives.

**Scripture lessons:** The first reading shows us how God saved the life of Abraham's son Isaac as a reward for Abraham's trusting Faith. While Abraham's son Isaac was spared, God's beloved Son, Jesus, underwent a cruel death on the cross for the salvation of the world, thus showing God's infinite love for mankind. That is why Paul recalls, in the second reading, that God the Father did not spare His own Son's life. God spared Abraham's son, but not His own! Why? Because God loves us with an everlasting love. Today's Responsorial Psalm speaks of God's distress at the death of anyone. *"Too costly in the eyes of the LORD is the death of His faithful"* In the Transfiguration story in today's Gospel, Jesus is revealed as a glorious figure, superior to Moses and Elijah. The primary purpose of Jesus' Transfiguration was to allow him to consult his Heavenly Father and ascertain His plan for His Son's suffering, death and resurrection. God's secondary aim was to make Jesus' chosen disciples aware of his Divine glory, so that they might discard their worldly ambitions and dreams of a conquering political Messiah and might be strengthened in their time of trial. On the mountain, Jesus is identified by the Heavenly Voice as the Son of God. Thus, the transfiguration narrative is a Christophany, that is, a manifestation or revelation of who Jesus really is. Describing Jesus' Transfiguration, the Gospel gives us a glimpse of the Heavenly glory awaiting those who do God's will by putting their trusting Faith in Him.

**Life messages:** (1) The transubstantiation in the Holy Mass is the source of our strength: In each Holy Mass, the bread and wine we offer on the altar are changed into the crucified and risen, living body and blood of Jesus. Just as Jesus' transfiguration strengthened the apostles in their time of trial, each holy Mass should be our source of heavenly strength against temptations, and our renewal during Lent. In addition, our holy Communion with the living Jesus should be the source of our daily "transfiguration," transforming our minds and hearts so that we may do more good by humble and selfless service to others.

(2) A message of encouragement and hope: In moments of doubt and during our dark moments of despair and hopelessness, the thought of our transformation in heaven will help us to reach out to God and to listen to His consoling words: *"This is my beloved son."* Let us offer our Lenten sacrifices to our Lord so that, through these practices of Lent and through the acceptance of our daily crosses, we may become closer to him in his suffering, may share in the carrying of his cross and finally may share the glory of his second "transfiguration," his Resurrection.

## **LENT II (MARCH 1) GEN 22: 1-18; ROM 8: 31-34; MARK 9: 2-10**

# 1: "O Lord, open his eyes so he may see." There is a mysterious story in 2 Kings that can help us understand what is happening in the transfiguration. Israel is at war with Aram, and Elisha, the man of God, is using his prophetic powers to reveal the strategic plans of the Aramean army to the Israelites. At first the King of Aram thinks that one of his officers is playing the spy, but when he learns the truth, he dispatches troops to go and capture Elisha who is residing in Dothan. The Aramean troops move in under cover of darkness and surround the city. In the morning Elisha's servant is the first to discover that they are surrounded and fears for his master's safety. He runs to Elisha and says, "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" The prophet answers "Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." But who would believe that when the surrounding mountainside was covered with advancing enemy troops? So Elisha prays, "O Lord, open his eyes so he may see." Then the Lord opens the servant's eyes, and he looks and sees the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:8-23). This vision was all that Elisha's disciple needed to reassure him. At the end of the story, not only was the prophet of God safe but the invading army was totally humiliated. (Fr. Munacci)

# 2: Transformation from pro-choice to pro-life: Dr. Peggy Hartshorn, president of *Heartbeat International*, tells a dramatic story about a woman who glimpsed the mystery of her unborn child. The young woman was seeking an abortion. She simply could not handle having a baby at this time. But she agreed to an ultrasound. When the baby appeared on the screen, the woman was amazed to see the perfectly formed body, the tiny legs and arms moving inside her womb. But the woman kept saying, "No, no, I have to have an abortion." Dr. Hartshorn felt sad. She knew that seventy-five percent of women who see an ultrasound decide to keep their baby - but that a quarter, nevertheless, still have the abortion. It seemed like this woman would be in that twenty-five percent. All of sudden, Dr. Hartshorn's assistant said, "Reach out and take your baby's hand." Dr. Hartshorn thought, "Oh, gosh, why is she saying that?" But the woman raised her hand and touched the monitor. As if by some divine cue, the baby stretched out his arm to the exact place of his mom's hand. On the screen his tiny fingers met hers. She kept her baby. There is a mystery inside each one of us - the mystery of the image of God. Today's Gospel tells us how three of the apostles saw a glimpse, a tiny glimpse, of who Jesus was. That would transform them and sustain them through some dark moments following Jesus' arrest.

# 3: "It's kind of hard to explain." A little boy asked his mother, "Marriage makes you have babies, doesn't it, Mom?" The mother reluctantly answered her son, "Well, not exactly. Just because you are married does not mean that you have a baby." The boy continued his inquiry: "Then how do you have babies?" His mother, not very enthusiastic about continuing, answered, "It's kind of hard to explain." The boy paused and thought for a moment. He then moved closer to Mom, looked her right in eye, and

carefully said, "You don't really know how it works, do you, Mom?" (Pastor's Story File, October 1995 Submitted by Jim Pearring, New Harbor Community Church, Benicia, California). Believe it or not, this is one of the most dreaded Sundays in the Christian year for folks who use the Lectionary for their preaching. Why? Because it deals with the Transfiguration of Jesus. Generally, this is one of those "What does that mean and how am I supposed to explain that?" sort of passages.

**Introduction:** The readings for the Second Sunday of Lent highlight Jesus' identity as *God's beloved Son* (revealed at his baptism and Transfiguration), and confront us with the mystery of his death on the cross. Hence, the main purpose of today's readings is to give us an invitation as well as a challenge to put our Faith in the loving promises of a merciful God Who sent His Son to die for us and to transform our lives by renewing them during Lent. Our transformed lives will enable us to radiate the glory and grace of the transfigured Lord around us by our Spirit-filled lives. The first reading shows us how God saved the life of Abraham's son Isaac as a reward for Abraham's trusting faith. Because of this faith, the Lord renewed his promise to Abraham for the blessings of land and progeny. While Abraham's son Isaac was spared, God's beloved Son, Jesus, underwent a cruel death on the cross. The linking of this story with the Gospel reading emphasizes God's infinite love, as seen in the redemptive sacrifice of His own Son for the salvation of the world. If the mystery of the sacrifice of Abraham's beloved son, Isaac, is hard to understand, the mystery of the death of God's beloved Son, Jesus, is far more challenging. That is why Paul reminds us, in the second reading, that God the Father did not spare His own Son's life. What an irony and paradox! God spared Abraham's son, but not His own! Why? Because God loves us with an everlasting love. Paul interprets God's willingness to sacrifice His own Son as proof of His great love for humankind and as God's pledge that He will always protect and provide for us. Today's Responsorial Psalm speaks of God's distress at the death of anyone. *"Too costly in the eyes of the LORD is the death of His faithful."* In the transfiguration story in today's Gospel, Jesus is revealed as a glorious figure, superior to Moses and Elijah. He is identified by the Heavenly Voice as the Son of God. Thus, the transfiguration narrative is a Christophany, that is, a manifestation or revelation of who Jesus really is. Describing Jesus' transfiguration, the Gospel shows us a glimpse of the Heavenly glory awaiting those who do God's will by putting their trusting Faith in Him.

**First reading, Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18:** The command to Abraham to sacrifice his only child was a real test of Abraham's great Faith and total trust in God. God had promised that Abraham would become the father of many nations. How could this be possible if Isaac were to be sacrificed? Although Yahweh's command was most painful, Abraham trusted that God was both faithful enough and powerful enough to keep His promise. The Lord responded by renewing His promise to Abraham that he would be the father of a great race. His progeny throughout the whole world would receive the blessing of God - Divine adoption through the Incarnation. Not only would Abraham's descendants be blessed, but all the nations of the earth would be blessed in him. The

story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac carries great significance. There is a clear parallel with Jesus in this story. Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son is a prototype of God the Father and His Son, Jesus. But the difference is that while Isaac was spared at the last moment, Jesus had to die. Just as to sacrifice his only son did not make sense to Abraham, it made even less sense to the disciples of Jesus that God could allow their Lord and master Jesus to be executed. It was only after Pentecost that the apostles realized that our eternal salvation was brought about by the suffering, death and Resurrection of Jesus.

**Second Reading, Romans 8:31b-34**: This passage shares with the first reading the image of a father's willingness to give up his son and the son's readiness to accept the father's will wholeheartedly. Paul assures us that it is by the perfect obedience to the will of his Father, expressed in his suffering and death, that Jesus was glorified and made our Heavenly intercessor. Paul also affirms that He who gave His Son for us will give us all things with him. We have every reason to have confidence in God because it is Christ Jesus at the right hand of the Father who intercedes for us, and nothing can separate us from the love of Christ for us. Paul's argument runs like this: "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*" Paul argues that the greatest proof that God is for us is the fact of the Incarnation and crucifixion of His Son Jesus for us sinners. It necessarily follows that God will give us the assistance that we need to get to Heaven.

**Exegesis:** The objective: The primary purpose of Jesus' Transfiguration was to allow him to consult his Heavenly Father and ascertain His plan for His Son's suffering, death and Resurrection. God's secondary aim was to make Jesus' chosen disciples aware of his Divine glory so that they might discard their worldly ambitions and dreams of a conquering political Messiah and might be strengthened in their time of trial. The Transfiguration also established Jesus' glorious identity as the beloved Son of God, and placed his Divine Sonship in the context of Jewish expectations about the kingdom and the resurrection. The event took place in late summer, just prior to the Feast of the Tabernacles. Hence, the Orthodox Church celebrates the Transfiguration at about the time of the year when it actually occurred, in order to connect it with the Old Testament Feast of the Tabernacles. The Western tradition recalls the Transfiguration at the beginning of Lent, then celebrates the formal feast on August 6.

The location of the Transfiguration was probably Mount Hermon in North Galilee, near Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus had camped a week before this wondrous event. Mt. Hermon was a desolate mountain, 9200 feet high. The traditional oriental belief that Transfiguration took place on Mount Tabor is based on Psalm 89:12. But Mount Tabor is a small mountain or a big hill in the south of Galilee, less than 1000 feet high, with a Roman fort built on it. Hence, it would have been an unlikely place for solitude and prayer.

The scene of Heavenly glory: While praying, Jesus was transfigured into a shining figure, full of Heavenly glory. This reminds us of Moses and Elijah who also experienced the Lord in all His glory. Moses had met the Lord in the burning bush at Mount Horeb (Exodus 3:1-4). After his encounter with God, Moses' face shone so brightly that the people were frightened, and Moses had to wear a veil over his face (Exodus 34:29-35). The Jews believed that Moses was taken up in a cloud at end of his earthly life (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 4. 326). Elijah traveled for forty days to Mt. Horeb on the strength of the food brought by an angel (1 Kings 19:8). At Mt. Horeb, Elijah sought refuge in a cave as the glory of the Lord passed over him (1 Kings 19:9-18). Finally, Elijah was taken directly to Heaven in a chariot of fire without seeing death (2 Kings 2:11 -15). These representatives of the Law and the Prophets – Moses and Elijah – foreshadowed Jesus, who is the culmination of the Law and the Prophets. Both earlier prophets were initially rejected by the people but vindicated by God. The Jews believed that the Lord had buried Moses in an unknown place after his death (Deut 34: 5-6), and that Elijah had been carried to heaven in a whirlwind (II Kings 2:11). Thus, the implication is that, although God spared Elijah from the normal process of death and Moses from normal burial, He did not spare His Son suffering and death. Peter, overwhelmed at the scene, says how good it is to be there. His remark about three booths (or tents) may be a reference to the Jewish festival of Succoth, the most joyful of Jewish holy days, when booths were erected from which all kinds of presents and sweets came. Or it may be a reference of reverence, alluding to tabernacles to house the patriarchs and the Son of God.

God the Father's Voice from the cloud: The book of Exodus describes how God spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai from the cloud. God often made appearances in a cloud (Exod 24:15-17; 13:21 -22; 34:5; 40:34; 1 Kings 8:10-11). I Kings, 8: 10 tells us how by the cover of a cloud, God revealed His presence in the Ark of the Covenant and in the Temple of Jerusalem on the day of its dedication. The Jews generally believed that the phenomenon of the cloud would be repeated when the Messiah arrived. God the Father, Moses and Elijah approved the plan regarding Jesus' suffering, death and Resurrection. God's words from the cloud, "*This is My beloved Son; listen to him,*" are similar to the words used by God at Jesus' baptism: "*You are My beloved Son; with you I am well pleased*" Mark 1:11). At the moment of Jesus' death, a Roman centurion would declare, "*Truly, this man was the Son of God*" (15:39). These words summarize the meaning of the Transfiguration, that on this mountain, God revealed Jesus as His Son -- His beloved -- the One in whom He is always well pleased and the One to whom we must listen.

The three transformations in our lives in our journey towards eternity: The first change begins at Baptism which washes away original sin, transforming us into children of God and heirs of heaven. The second transformation takes place through our victory over the trials and tribulations of life. Every challenge, every difficulty, every moment of suffering, is an opportunity for transformation and spiritual growth. The third

transformation takes place at death. Eternal life in heaven, perhaps after a period of further transformation in purgatory, is granted to those who have been found worthy. The last transformation or transfiguration will be completed at the Second Coming when our glorified body is reunited with our soul.

**Life messages:** (1) The transubstantiation in the Holy Mass is the source of our strength: In each Holy Mass, the bread and wine we offer on the altar are changed into the crucified and risen, living body and blood of Jesus. Just as Jesus' Transfiguration strengthened the apostles in their time of trial, each holy Mass should be our source of heavenly strength against temptations, and our renewal during Lent. In addition, our holy Communion with the living Jesus should be the source of our daily "transfiguration," transforming our minds and hearts so that we may do more good by humble and selfless service to others.

(2) Each time we receive one of the Sacraments, we are transformed: For example, Baptism transforms us into sons and daughters of God and heirs of heaven. Confirmation makes us temples of the Holy Spirit and warriors of God. By the Sacrament of Reconciliation, God brings back the sinner to the path of holiness.

(3) A message of encouragement and hope: In moments of doubt and during our dark moments of despair and hopelessness, the thought of our transformation in Heaven will help us to reach out to God and to listen to His consoling words: "This is my beloved son." Let us offer our Lenten sacrifices to our Lord so that, through these practices of Lent and through the acceptance of our daily crosses, we may become closer to him in his suffering, may share in the carrying of his cross and may finally share the glory of his final "transfiguration," his Resurrection.

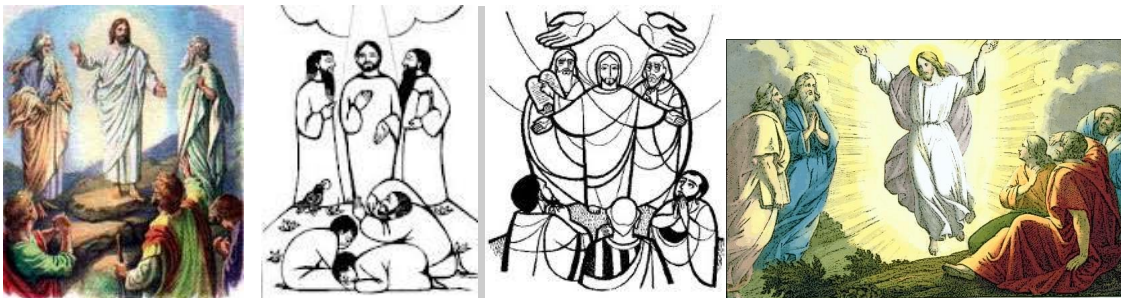
4) We need "mountain-top experiences" in our lives: We share the "mountain-top experience" of Peter, James and John when we spend extra time in prayer during Lent. Fasting for one day will help the body to store up spiritual energy. This spiritual energy can help us have thoughts that are far higher and nobler than our usual mundane thinking. The hunger we experience puts us more closely in touch with God and makes us more willing to help the hungry. The crosses of our daily lives also can lead us to the glory of transfiguration and resurrection.

5) We need transformation in our Christian lives so that we may seek reconciliation instead of revenge, love our enemies, pray for those who hate us, give to the needy without expecting a reward, refuse to judge others and make friends with those we don't naturally like. This transformation will also enable us to hold back on harsh words and let love rule so that we may seek reconciliation rather than revenge, pray for those who give us a hard time, avoid bad-mouthing those we don't agree with, forgive those who hurt us and love those who hate us.

**JOKE OF THE WEEK:** 1) A certain missionary on a study trip to the Holy Land was visiting Jaffa (Joppa) where Peter was residing when he baptized Cornelius (Acts 10). The breath-taking beauty of this small seaside town was such that it inspired him to come up with this joke: At the Transfiguration Peter offered to build three tents, one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. Jesus said, "And what about you, Peter?" And Peter replies, "Don't worry about me Lord, I got a better place in Jaffa."

2) Transformation in old age: Two old men are chatting. One man says, "My friend, you must try this memory pill I'm taking. I remember everything. It's an amazing memory booster." The other man says, "Sounds wonderful. What is the name of the pill?" The first man says, "Hmm! The name of the pill ... Let's see ... Hmmm, what is the name of the flower produced on a garden plant with thorns? It's red ... You give it on Valentine's Day." The other man says, "A rose?" The first man says, "Yes, that's right!" Then, calling for his wife, he says, "Rose, what is the name of that pill which I take to boost my memory?"

3) Lenten penance: An Irishman moves into a tiny hamlet in County Kerry, walks into the pub and promptly orders three beers. The bartender raises his eyebrows, but serves the man three beers, which he drinks quietly at a table, alone and orders three more. As this continued every day the bartender asked him politely, "The folks around here are wondering why you always order three beers?" "It's odd, isn't it?" the man replies, "You see, I have two brothers, and one went to America, and the other to Australia. We promised each other that we would always order an extra two beers whenever we drank." Then, one day, the man comes in and orders only two beers. As this continued for several days, the bartender approached him with tears in his eyes and said, "Folks around here, me first of all, want to offer condolences to you for the death of your brother. You know-the two beers and all..." The man ponders this for a moment, and then replies with a broad smile, "You'll be happy to know that my two brothers are alive and well. It's just that I, myself, have decided to give up drinking for Lent. Now I am drinking for the other two!"



### **Transfiguration in children**

If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.

If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight.  
 If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy.  
 If a child lives with shame, he learns to feel guilty.  
 If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.  
 If a child lives with encouragement, he learns confidence.  
 If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate.  
 If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice.  
 If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith.  
 If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself.

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship,  
 he learns to find love in the world.

**18- Additional anecdotes:** 1) **"Lord, give me the grace for transformation."** The word transfiguration means a change in form or appearance. Biologists call it metamorphosis (derived from the Greek word *metamorphoomai* used in Matthew's Gospel), to describe the change that occurs when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. As children we might have curiously watched the process of the caterpillar turning into a chrysalis and then bursting into a beautiful Monarch butterfly. Fr. Anthony De Mello tells the story of such a metamorphosis in the prayer life of an old man. "I was a revolutionary when I was young and all my prayer to God was: 'Lord, give me the grace to change the world.' As I approached middle age and realized that half of my life was gone without changing a single soul, I changed my prayer to: 'Lord, give me the grace to change all those who come in contact with me; just my family and friends and I shall be satisfied.' Now that I am old and my days are numbered, I have begun to see how foolish I have been. My one prayer now is: 'Lord, give me the grace to change myself.' If I had prayed for this right from the start, I should not have wasted my life."

2) **"The March of the Ducks."** On the side of the Peabody Hotel in Orlando, Florida, there is a cutout of a large duck symbolizing what came to be known as "The March of the Ducks." Each day at 11 a.m. and 5 p.m., the hotel people lay down a dazzling red carpet across the lobby. Then one of John Phillip Sousa's famous marches is played over the intercom. Whereupon, ten ducks, in single file, march down the red carpet in perfect harmony with the Sousa march. The ducks take a dip in the hotel fountain and then march out again in single file, down the red carpet, keeping perfectly in step with the beat of the music. For those who have witnessed "The March of the Ducks," it is an event so vivid and real and uplifting and fun-filled that it's difficult to find the right words to describe the wonder and the beauty of it -- much less try to convince someone that it is true. Today's Gospel Lesson describes an event called "transfiguration of Jesus" so wondrous and so beautiful as to defy all description (Watch: <http://video.google.com/videosearch?hl=en&q=March+of+the+Peabody+ducks&um>)



3) **Noah and the ark:** Two men were standing in a big city waiting shed on a rainy day trying to hire a taxicab, not an easy task since it was raining very hard. One man turned to the other and started a conversation which went as follows: First man: "If it keeps raining like this we'll all have to build an ark."

Second man: "What's an ark?"

First man: "You mean you haven't heard about Noah and the ark, and the great flood and all those animals?"

Second man: "Look, my friend, I've only been in town for a day, and I haven't even had time to read a newspaper." Today's Gospel Lesson includes Mark's version of the Transfiguration story. Did I hear someone ask, "What's a Transfiguration?"

4) **A Death That Gives Life:** A few years ago, the television and print media carried the story of a seven-year-old boy who died in tragic circumstances while on vacation with his family in Italy. Armed thieves, attempting to take the family's car and valuables, waited in ambush in the Italian countryside. As the car passed, the thieves sprayed a shower of bullets at the vehicle. Although the family was able to escape, some of the bullets had hit the young boy, while he slept in the back seat. A short time later, the child was pronounced dead at a nearby hospital. People were shocked and outraged as the sad news was reported. But public outrage was soon replaced by wonder and admiration. The boy's family arranged that all of their son's vital organs be harvested and donated. As a result, the lives of eight Italians, each of whom received one or more of the child's healthy organs, were forever changed. For some it meant being able to see again; for others death was postponed because a young vital organ had replaced an aged, defective one. Because organ donation was such a rarity in Italy, the gift of life was all the more remarkable. This story reminds us of the death of another Son, whose dying brought life to so many. It is the life-giving death of this other Son, namely, Jesus, which is the focus of our Scripture readings for today.

5) **"I have seen the face of the pilot."** Robert Louis Stevenson tells the story about a ship that was in serious trouble in a storm. A passenger on that ship, defying orders, made his way to the pilot, who seeing the fear on the passenger's face gave him a smile of assurance. Relieved, the traveler returned to his cabin and said, "I have seen the face of the pilot. He smiled and all is well." There are times in life when we need to see our pilot face-to-face. That's what happened in this mystical story that the Church calls the Transfiguration of Christ. Peter, James and John were there. Moses and Elijah showed up from the past. They had an experience that was mystical and out of this world. "Turn you eyes upon Jesus/Look full in his wonderful face," sings the hymn. What would a glimpse of Christ himself mean to you today?

6) **Could your soul use a lift today?** People pay big money for radiant faces these days. Face-lifts are a thriving business. The only problem is that the soul has a way of seeping through. Maxwell Maltz is a plastic surgeon. He's in the business of lifting people's faces, but, Dr. Maltz says, "Even though I get marvelous results, patients are often not

happy. I have come to realize that inner scars are much more difficult to remove than outer ones." Could your soul use a lift today? Have depression, difficulty, duties and daily routines caused your soul to sag, your spirit to falter, your heart to sink? Christ came to lift us. Our reflections on the transfigured Christ will give us a spiritual lift.

7) "I'll fight, I'll fight, I'll fight to the very end." William Booth. He was a Methodist preacher, too, you know. "Willful Will" they called him, but Booth became disillusioned with the political wrangling of the Methodists. So he left the church and started a Christian mission in the poverty-stricken East Side of London that reached out to the worst. That Christian mission became the Salvation Army, which declared war on poverty and homelessness. Or, as William Booth said: "While women weep, as they do now, I'll fight. While children go hungry, as they do now, I'll fight. While there remains one dark soul without the light of God, I'll fight, I'll fight, I'll fight to the very end." That was one hundred years ago. It seems like the kind of war all of us could get behind, the war on poverty, the war on homelessness. Maybe it's time for another William Booth. If you have a heart, help us. Discipleship is a matter of your heart. "Turn your eyes upon Jesus,/Look full in His wonderful face," as Peter did on the mount of transfiguration. He'll give you a lift. He'll give you a life.

8) An army of green giants who kept on coming and coming. The legendary football coach Knute Rockne knew the power of fear. Today we call it "psyching out your opponent." Notre Dame was facing a critical football game against a vastly superior Southern California team. Rockne recruited every brawny student he could find at Notre Dame and suited up about a hundred "hulks" in the school uniform. On the day of the game the Southern California team ran out on the field first and awaited the visiting Fighting Irish. Then, out of the dressing room came an army of green giants who kept on coming and coming. The USC team panicked. Their coach reminded them that Rockne could only play eleven men at a time, but the damage was done. USC lost. They did not lose to the hundred men. They were beaten by their own fear. [A. Philip Parham, *Letting God*, (New York: Harper & Row). 3. W. Howard Chase in *Vital Speeches*.] Today's Gospel says: "[Peter] *hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified.*" Witnessing the Transfiguration of Christ was not the only time the disciples were fearful in Jesus' presence.

9) "Mountain-top experience" of Terry Anderson: Former American hostage Terry Anderson recalls the Autumn before he was captured. For some reason he felt drawn to an old church. It was 1984. Terry and his fiancée, Madeleine, were visiting her father in Sunderland, England. Terry looked forward to some peace and quiet from his hectic career as a journalist. He was so dispirited that it took him some days to settle down, even in the pleasant atmosphere of this English hamlet. As he walked through the streets with Madeleine, inhaling the crisp air, he noticed a church steeple outlined against the pale blue sky. Terry had been brought up in the church but had drifted far from God and, in his own words, considered himself an agnostic. That afternoon he

wondered why that church had captured his attention. After a few days, he decided to walk over to the church. He opened the heavy oaken door, stepped in and sat down in a worn pew. Looking up at the altar and cross gleaming in the shadows, he suddenly had a strong sense of coming home. He knew that was where he belonged. Terry reaffirmed his Faith that day. For the next six months Terry wondered why he had been drawn to that church. He thought perhaps God was calling him to do something, "but what?" he wondered. He was beginning to sense a closer relationship with God, when one morning on a street in Beirut he was shoved at gunpoint into the back of a green Mercedes. His face was pressed to the floor and a blanket thrown over him as the car accelerated. The date was March 16, 1985. While in captivity Terry began reading the Bible. The Bible characters came to life! He came to know them as living beings ["Small Graces," Terry Anderson, *Guideposts* (September 1993), p. 2-5.] Terry Anderson found the strength to endure years of captivity because God was with him. The "mountain-top experience" in the little English church was preparation for what lay ahead.

10) "I meet God about one in every eight worship services": A young woman asked her older co-worker: "Why do you go to Church every Sunday? Does something happen there that can't happen somewhere else? And does it happen every Sunday?" The older woman replied, "What happens is I go to meet the God whom I've come to know in Jesus. God meets me in other settings than at Church. However, I must confess that I'm sure I miss most of God's appointments with me. I find that I live most of my days in a daze - as though I'm sleepwalking or on autopilot. I go to Church to be reminded that that's true." The younger woman then asked, "So you go to Church every week and God meets you there?" The older woman answered, "I go to Church every Sunday and for reasons I can't explain, I meet God about one in every eight worship services." The younger woman asked, "Then why do you go every Sunday?" "I go every Sunday," said the older woman, "because I never know when that one Sunday is going to be." Peter, John and James had that experience on the mountain of transfiguration.

11) Edmund Hillary and a Sherpa guide, Tenzing Norgay: Those of us who are old enough certainly recall that amazing story of more than sixty years ago, May 29, 1953. A New Zealand beekeeper named Edmund Hillary and a Sherpa guide, Tenzing Norgay, were the first ever to reach Everest's summit. Here was a mountain - unreachable, tantalizing, fearsome, deadly - that had defeated 15 previous expeditions. Some of the planet's strongest climbers had perished on its slopes. For many, Everest represented the last of the earth's great challenges. The North Pole had been reached in 1909; the South Pole in 1911. But Everest, often called the Third Pole, had defied all human efforts - reaching its summit seemed beyond mere mortals. (Don George, "A Man to Match His Mountain," [http://www.salon.com/bc/1998/12/cov\\_01bc.html](http://www.salon.com/bc/1998/12/cov_01bc.html)) Now, success. And heightening the impact even further was the delicious coincidence of their arrival just before the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and of the dramatic announcement of their triumph on the morning of the coronation. A "mountain-top experience"...literally. Today's Gospel presents the "mountain-top experience" of Peter, John and James.

12) **Serve others after the "mountain-top experience"**: In Port Arthur, Texas, there is a special school for very sick children, most of whom have few, if any, motor skills. One very sick boy lived at that school, dying little by little. As tragic as that is, that's not the point of the story. Unfortunately children get grievously ill every day. This little boy, though, had the good fortune to be living in the same community with some faithful believers who took the Transfiguration story as their own. God's glory lived in them. They carried it with them wherever they went. A group of these folks joined together to go to this little boy every day and read to him. Since he was slowly dying, unable to move or read for himself, their act of kindness and ministry was the only activity that brought him any comfort. The social workers were amazed. Just being read to by three different women, one every day, transformed that boy. He was transformed from being depressed and despondent into a responsive bright young man. And even though his spark of life would soon leave him, it got brighter and brighter not dimmer. The boy died, but his life had been forever changed. It had been transformed by the ministry of these caring Christians. They had allowed the light of Christ to shine through them. And a young boy's life had been transformed. [*The Clergy Journal*, Logos Productions Inc, Inver Grove Heights, MN, Vol LXXIII, Number 7, pp. 88.]

13) **Moses' flute**: John Killinger tells the legend about "the simple shepherd's pipe once played by Moses when he kept his father-in-law's flocks. When the pipe was discovered, many years after Moses' death, it was decided that it should be put on display for the benefit of his admirers. But it looked far too common for such an important purpose, so someone suggested that it be embellished by an artist. A few centuries later, when the pipe was given a new home in an upscale museum, a committee said it needed improving yet again. So another artist was employed to overlay it in fine gold and silver filigree. The result, in the end, was a breathtaking piece of art, a marvelous sight indeed. It was so beautiful, in fact, that no one ever noticed that it was no longer capable of the clear, seductive notes once played upon it by Moses." [*God, the Devil, and Harry Potter* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2002), 162-3.] How do we tell what voices to listen to, whose advice to take, what directives are important, and what we should just let fall on deaf ears? In today's Gospel text, the Divine Voice from the enshrouding cloud offered Peter, James, and John simple, straightforward words: "This is My Beloved Son; listen to Him." The message and mission of Jesus was to guide the disciples, informing all their actions, influencing all else they heard. God's proclamation to those three disciples is the same for all who follow Christ today: Let Jesus be your high-tech hearing aid, filtering and clarifying what you hear and how you respond. Listen to him. Or as Jesus put it elsewhere, "Learn from Me."

14) **Baby powder**: You might remember comedian Yakov Smirnoff. When he first came to the United States from Russia, he was not prepared for the incredible variety of instant products available in American grocery stores. He says, "On my first shopping trip, I saw powdered milk: you just add water, and you get milk. Then I saw powdered orange juice: you just add water, and you get orange juice. And then I saw baby

powder, and I thought to myself, 'What a country!'" Smirnoff is joking but we make these assumptions about Christian Transformation—that people change instantly at salvation. Some denominations make Christianity so simple: accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, confess your sins to him, you are instantly saved and born again. Some traditions call it repentance and renewal. Some call it Sanctification of the believer. Whatever you call it most traditions expect some quick fix to sin. We go to Church as if we are going to the grocery store: Powdered Christian. Just add water and you get disciples! Unfortunately, there is no such powder, and disciples of Jesus Christ are not instantly born. They are slowly raised through many trials, suffering, and temptations.

15) "**Well, what is it?**" H.G. Wells once told a fascinating story about an Episcopalian bishop, though he could have been a cleric in any denomination. He was the kind of man who could always be counted on to provide a pious platitude. He had a favorite answer that always served him in good stead. When troubled folks came to him, he would assume his best stained-glass voice and ask, "Have you prayed about it?" If said in just the right way, no more needed to be said. The bishop himself didn't pray much. After all, his life was quite uneventful. He felt quite self-sufficient. One day, however, life tumbled in on him, and he found himself overwhelmed. It occurred to the bishop that maybe he should take some of his own advice. So, one Saturday afternoon he entered the cathedral. He knelt down and folded his hands before the altar. He could not help but think how childlike he was. Then he began to pray, "O God...." Suddenly there was a voice. It was crisp, businesslike. The voice said, "Well, what is it?" When the worshipers came to Sunday services the next morning, they found the bishop sprawled face down before the altar. When they turned him over, they discovered he was dead. Lines of horror were etched upon his face. The good bishop had advised others to approach God in prayer, but when he found himself face to face with the Almighty, it scared him literally to death as Christ's Transfiguration scene scared the three apostles. (Haddon Robinson, *Preaching Today*).

16) **Transformation of a young man with a sense of duty:** Years ago, in a small fishing village in Holland one night, the winds raged, and a gale force storm capsized a fishing boat at sea. Stranded and in trouble, the crew sent out the S.O.S. The captain of the rescue rowboat team sounded the alarm. While the team launched their rowboat and fought their way through the wild waves, the villagers waited restlessly on the beach. An hour later, the rescue boat reappeared through the fog and the volunteers reported that the rescue boat could not hold any more passengers and they had to leave one man behind. Frantically, the captain called for another volunteer team to go after the lone survivor. Sixteen-year-old Hans stepped forward. His mother grabbed his arm, pleading, "Please don't go. Your father died in a shipwreck 10 years ago and your older brother, Paul, has been lost at sea for three weeks. Hans, you are all I have left." Hans replied, "Mother, I have to go. What if everyone said, 'I can't go, let someone else do it?' Mother, this time I have to do my duty. Hans kissed his mother, joined the team and disappeared into the

night. Another hour passed, which seemed to Hans' mother like an eternity. Finally, the rescue boat darted through the fog with Hans standing up in the bow. Cupping his hands, the captain called, "Did you find the lost man?" Barely able to contain himself, Hans excitedly yelled back, "Yes, we found him. Tell my mother it's my older brother, Paul!" (Fr. Botelho).

17) **Transfigured by Jesus:** One of the things that impressed me most when I first read the story of Fatima was that the children went into a trance once Our Lady appeared, and nothing anybody around them could do was able to distract them. You could stick pins in their fingers, or hold a burning candle to their hands, and they remained totally oblivious to it all. It is evident that, once they got in touch with that other world, it was all absorbing, and it was the centre of their faces, and a light in their eyes that amazed all those who watched. That expression was also evident on the face of Saint Padre Pio as he offered Mass, or prayed on his own. It is not surprising, then, that the apostles should have been given this glimpse of Jesus. (Jack McArdle in *And That the Gospel Truth*; quoted by Fr. Botelho).

18) **Pigeon Feathers:** John Updike wrote a short story called "Pigeon Feathers." It's about a young boy, David, who begins to have doubts about his faith. One night in bed David is thinking about his problem. Suddenly he decides upon a bold experiment. He takes his hands from under the covers, lifts them above his head, and asks Jesus to touch them. As David waits breathlessly, he thinks he feels something touch his hands; he is not sure if they have been touched or not. We can all relate to David in this scene. We too experience times when our faith seems to disappear or go behind a cloud. When this happens, we long desperately for a sign that God is real and that Jesus is the Son of God. Or to put it in another way, we long for a sign of Jesus' glory, like the one Peter, James and John received in today's Gospel. May we call upon His power and presence when put to the test! (Mark Link in *Sunday Homilies*; quoted by Fr. Botelho)