

Homily - Second Sunday of Lent
March 08, 2009

Introduction

The modern phrase "peak experience" best describes what happened to Peter, James and John in the Gospel [Jesus' transfiguration before their eyes] we just heard.

This strikes me as all the more true when we recall that the transfiguration event took place shortly after Jesus predicted his approaching trial and execution in Jerusalem - and shortly before two more similar predictions.

I

This peak experience of the three disciples, I would suggest, invites us to remember some of our own - graced moments when we saw things with great clarity:

-the experience of falling in love and knowing that I am loved and capable of loving another person;

-or the similar experience of one's wedding day, or a special birthday, when we are celebrated by friends and family;

-or the experience of a daughter's or son's graduation for high school or college - or perhaps one's own graduation;

-perhaps a special Christmas we once celebrated in company with family/loved ones.

II

These peak experiences, however, don't last, do they. (Peter, James and John had to come back down that mountainside and face real life again, including the grim business of Jesus' death.) But we do like to revisit such experiences - relive them, savor them, recall their sheer joy.

III

A parish mission, such as the one we begin here at St. Anthony's this weekend can be a revisiting of such peak experiences, a kind of memory retrieval for us. The mission is a time of grace, of clarity, a true gift offered by the Holy Spirit particularly during this season of Lent. It is an opportunity to remember and experience once again the action of God in our lives and in this world.

IV

Let me very briefly outline here how we plan to approach these days of our Lenten mission/retreat in this faith community that is St. Anthony's.

In consultation with the pastor and others, we've settled on a well-known phrase from the Prophet Micah in the Hebrew Scriptures. You doubtless remember this passage: "This is what God asks of you, only this: to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God". I plan to take up each of these challenges, but in reverse order.

Therefore on Monday evening we shall look at who this Divine Being is with whom we are called to walk humbly; on Tuesday evening a reflection on what it means to "love tenderly"; and on the final evening, Wednesday, we shall consider how one "acts justly" in our modern world.

Conclusion

By way of summary let me tell you a story, one which I believe is quite relevant for these days of our parish mission. Some years ago a great American missionary returned after a long career in Africa and was assigned by his congregation to campus ministry in a large eastern Catholic university. Shortly after taking up that ministry, he told me, a young graduate student approached him and asked if he would consent to being her spiritual companion, director, as she made some important decisions about her life. The priest readily agreed. Then, he told me, the student asked him a very significant and penetrating question. She said: "Father, are you willing to walk with me under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to a place where neither of us has ever been".

I believe that a parish mission such as this which we begin this weekend lends itself to such a possibility - of walking together to a place where none of us has ever been. If we take seriously these days of grace here at St. Anthony's, it is very possible that we could go to a depth and breadth of understanding where we've never been before.

This is my prayer for all of us this week and I ask that it be yours as well; and that you take seriously the grace being offered in and through this parish Lenten mission.