

First Reading: Exodus 34:29-35

²⁹Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. ³⁰When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. ³²Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. ³³When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; ³⁴but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, ³⁵the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 3:12--4:2

¹²Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, ¹³not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. ¹⁴But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. ¹⁵Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; ¹⁶but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

^{4:1}Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. ²We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

Gospel: Luke 9:28-36 [37-43a]

²⁸Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³²Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. ³⁴While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" ³⁶When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

So how many of you have been to a transfiguration lately? How many of you have climbed a mountain with someone only to watch their clothes become dazzling white before you, to see their face change, hear a voice from a cloud, and oh by the way, some famous prophets, who have been dead for a few hundred years also happen to show up?

What do we make of this story? What in the world is going on here? Every year we celebrate this event on the last Sunday in the church season of Epiphany; and every year we talk about how Jesus takes the inner three disciples, goes up this mountain, and is transfigured. Though we read an account about this every year, though we talk about the mountain tops and valleys of life and the roads we travel, I'm not sure 2,000 years later that we, in our own humanity, really have grasped what happened on this day. Sometimes there are things in the Bible, sometimes there are things that Jesus does, sometimes there are things that happen to Jesus, that we simply do not completely understand. For me, I think today marks one such event.

Things often happen in this life that we don't know what to do with. The expected and the unexpected pop up, invade, interfere, or are thrust upon us and we are often bewildered.

A story is told about a man named John Deckard, who was a quiet and modest man. He lived in a little English village with his family and worked every day. Upon coming home from work however, he would always retreat to his small garden in the backyard. For Deckard had one claim to fame. For five consecutive years he had won the blue ribbon in the village garden show with his prize roses. It had gone on for so long that people expected his victory. Deckard's prize rose would win and that was that. Behind his house in the rose garden, he would don his coveralls and

spend his time out there with his roses. Some people said he just had a way with flowers. Some said it was the way he talked to them that helped them grow. One particular year, Deckard knew that he would again win the blue ribbon, for this year his rose among roses, was his best ever. This year was his masterpiece, and as he watched it grow daily, his contentment and pride grew. The show was on a Saturday and he planned to transplant his rose into a pot early that morning. But while eating breakfast, the tragedy happened. His young granddaughter burst into the kitchen and chatting excitedly, rushed to the table and said, "Look grandpa, look what I picked for you!" And in her dirt covered hand, half the petals gone, was the prize rose. That afternoon, visitors to the garden show were astonished when they came to Deckard's rose entry. For in a flower pot he had thrust a stick, and attached to it, at the very top, was a picture of his granddaughter – a rose by another name. When the judges heard what had happened, they gave Deckard an honorary ribbon. Some said that the rose, that was not a rose, was the finest he had ever grown.

Sometimes things interact in our lives in ways that we didn't expect, and we are given a choice on how we will respond. Sometimes it can be things like a flower losing its petal, a vase or favorite knickknack being broken; to a life challenging event like a health diagnosis, an unplanned occurrence, or an unexpected death. Whatever the range of impact of such events, in the midst of those moments we are certainly reminded of our humanity, of our ultimate dependence on God, and how we often do not understand many things of life. Things happen in this life that we don't know what to do with. The expected and the unexpected pop up, invade, interfere, or are thrust upon us, and we are often bewildered.

However, we are in good company. Even the three disciples don't know what to do with what happened in front of their own eyes. Maybe that's in part why the text says: "that they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen." Or depending on which Gospel you read, why Jesus orders the disciples not to tell anyone about this, because basically at that moment, it was apparent that these followers of Jesus did not understand what was going on.

The journey of faith is sometimes like that. Sometimes we are stumbling disciples who want to build tents because we don't know how to act, or what to do, in given situations, especially ones we have never experienced before. Especially when we are coming off a mountain and are headed toward a valley. But also, once in a while, we are disciples who get to stand on the mountain top and see a vision of Moses, Elijah, and even Jesus, and once again discover that there is something bigger unfolding in this world than just our own often boxed-in viewpoint.

Good things and bad things occur in this life. Triumph and terror often develop. People die. People get sick. Companies close. People move away. Separations happen. Things transpire that we simply cannot get our minds around. So we travel this road of life through valleys and mountains often confused and bewildered. Often talking about what just happened. Talking about what might come next, wondering what we are going to tell the other disciples about what just happened, trying to convince ourselves to continue on the journey even though it might look like there are crosses ahead. But yet we still continue the journey with Jesus. We still continue the trek. We still leave the mountain and head for the valley even when we do not know what is going on and even when we do not know what is going to happen. The journey of faith is like that – full of surprises, full of

challenge, complete with mountaintops, complete with valleys, opportunities to experience the unknown, opportunities to get a glimpse of what seems unreal.

So where is your journey this March of 2019? What is unfolding in your life that leaves you bewildered? What is unfolding that leaves you in awe? What is unfolding that leaves you questioning what just happened? What mountaintop are you ascending? What mountaintops are you descending? How have you experienced the Holy Spirit in the center of all these things? Where do you see God provoking you? Poking you? Comforting you? Lifting you?

This Wednesday, we leave the mountaintop of the transfiguration, and begin the journey, like the disciples did, that leads to the thrill of palm branch celebrative entrance into Jerusalem, that leads to the Lord's final supper, that leads to an arrest, that leads to crucifixion, that leads to more questions and bewilderment. How will following the path of our Lord's journey to the cross entwine with your own journey of faith, how will it entwine with your path of life, how will it entwine with your daily outlook, daily decisions, and daily perspective? What will you be seeking to cultivate in your life? What things will you be seeking to let go of in order to more fully embrace your faith and living?

"Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart." Amen.