



**2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT-A-2008 FEBRUARY 17, 2008**

**FR. JOE SOBIERAJSKI**

**GENESIS 12:1-4A 2 TIMOTHY 1:8B-10**

**MATTHEW 17:1-9**

The last painting of the great Renaissance artist Raphael was not one of the many Madonna's for which he is so justly famous, but the *Transfiguration*, a large work commissioned by Cardinal Giulio de Medici which is now in the Vatican picture gallery. Effusively called Raphael's "the most beautiful and most divine" work by the biographer Giorgio Vasari, the painting is divided into two distinct parts. The upper part shows the transfigured Christ floating in a cloudy sky between Moses and Elijah, while Peter, John and James lay prostrate on the rocky ground each shading their eyes from the intense light radiating from Jesus. The lower part of the painting shows the earth bound Apostles in relative darkness as they try unsuccessfully to drive a demon from a possessed boy. The upper part of the painting is all light, graceful and symmetrical, while the lower is heavy and chaotic, full of conflicting motion. Through his great artistic skill, Raphael seems to have captured the inherent confusion of Christ's Apostles before His Resurrection, with the clarity of identity and mission that Christ tries to show them but which they will completely understand only after His Resurrection.

In our First Reading from *Genesis* this morning, the wheels of salvation history are set into motion by the threefold promise of Yahweh to Abram: Abram will receive the land shown him, his descendants will form a great people and God's favor will flow into Abram's posterity and effect the return of all humankind to God. These promises are dependent on Abram's obedience to God's command, "Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you." Here it all begins with the one to whom Jew, Christian, and Muslim alike trace their origins as he and his wife Sara enter into a relationship and agreement with God. Abraham is the first "believer", our father in faith.

Like Mark and Luke, Matthew puts the event of our Gospel reading, the Transfiguration, within the context of Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, his first prediction of the Passion, and the cross of discipleship. Every year the Second Sunday of Lent is for us as Catholics "Transfiguration Sunday". Jesus with Peter, John and James as His companions climb a high mountain, the meeting place between God and man, and there Jesus is suddenly "transfigured. We are told that "His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light." The three Apostles are privileged to see Him in the glory that will be His when He returns to the Father at

the Ascension. Here, the transfigured Christ is meant to illuminate our Lenten journey. He reminds us, if we need to be reminded, that the sad tragedy of the Lord's Passion and Death on the Cross must be seen within the context of His resurrected glory.

Jesus usually goes to the mountain to pray, and so the whole of this Transfiguration event should be seen an experience of prayer for Him and the three who accompany Him. After the change in Jesus' appearance, Moses and Elijah appear conversing with Him. Both of these men in their earthly lives have gone to the mountain to experience Yahweh. Moses found Him in thunder and lightening and his face was transformed by the meeting. Elijah found Him in a still, small voice which gave him the courage to complete his mission. We don't know what their conversation with Jesus was about, but we do know that for Peter, James and John the vision was intoxicating. It seems an event that Peter wants to extend by building three huts for Jesus, Moses and Elijah to dwell. But, there is even more to this experience, "While they were talking, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them." And a voice came from the cloud and said, "This is My beloved Son...listen to Him." This cloud is the mysterious *Shekinah* that accompanied the Hebrews in the Sinai. The "pillar of cloud" that was God's presence among His people.

As Jesus sets out on the road to Jerusalem that will lead to His Passion and Death, the Voice that supported and encouraged Him at His baptism again does the same giving Him the strength He will need when faced with the events of Good Friday. Here, however, it is also the Voice heard by Peter, James, and John to encourage them, to strengthen them for what was surely to fill them with fear and shake their faith in Christ. This prayer is an out-flowing of God's grace which does prepare Jesus for what is to follow. For the other three, the experience is real, but not fully understood. Only with the Lord's Resurrection will they come to comprehend its meaning. If indeed the three followed the Voice's command to "listen" to Jesus, it was after His Resurrection that they began to understand and to believe in what Christ had said.

The Voice from the cloud is, of course, also for us. We need to "listen to Him" yet again this Lent. No matter how many times we've listened in the past, no matter how well we think we know the story and the lessons He tries to teach us, it is time to listen with new ears. What does Christ have to say to me this year? Is there something new that I need to know about Him or about myself? Perhaps like Peter I might become overwhelmed by what I learn, and not be quite able to take it all in, but of this much I can be sure, if I listen to Jesus I will not be disappointed by His words.

In Paul's *Second Letter to Timothy* today reminds us that just as God spoke to Abram, to Jesus, to James, John and Peter, He continues to speak to us today. On occasion, however, what

we hear we might rather not! Through Paul's words God encourages a fearful Timothy to continue preaching the Good News. Just as Jesus followed the will of the Father, Timothy now must do the same but aware that the strength and courage of Christ is with him. We too must remember that no matter what awaits us, we can also have the strength and courage of Christ with us.

*How does the Lord speak to us?* There are of course many ways since the Lord tries to communicate Himself to us every moment of our day, but it is probably in prayer and in Scripture that His voice is most easily heard. The daily Scripture readings of this Season are especially rich. To take advantage of these readings as the basis for our prayer during these forty days not only allows us to hear the message intended for all, but also gives us the opportunity to spend some time with those readings and perhaps to better understand what God is saying to me this Lent. How He is calling me to be transfigured, perhaps not in the same way that Christ was, but to be transformed by what we hear and then make part of the every day living of our lives.

From the cloud the Voice of the Father told Peter, John and James to "Listen to Him." Listening to His Son seems advice we too should take. To do that we frankly have to not only slow down but also to stop for a few minutes the hectic activity which seems to dominate most of our lives, and to enter into the realm of silence. Silence is rare in our society with the sounding of cell phones, and the other chirps, beeps, and bops of the other technological toys that try to interact with us in the course of a day. Silence also means that we have to simply shut-up and allow ourselves to hear His Voice that may either boom or whisper, but which will speak if only we give Him the chance. Try it this week! Give the Lord five or ten quiet minutes. You might find that both He and you will demand more time, and you will begin to be transformed.