

2nd Sunday of Lent (Extraordinary Form) – March 8, 2020 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Our Lady, Help of Christians Parish, Huntsville – 7:30a Sung Mass, 11a Low Mass – 750 words

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Last Sunday we contemplated the temptations to which Christ submitted himself in his humanity; this Sunday, we are given a glimpse of his divinity. And this vision is meant to bolster us amidst our Lenten discipline, for so often the weight of our humanity brings us down. We are intimately acquainted with our weakness, and even, at times, with a sense that we can never rise above it. But that glimpse of future glory in the Transfiguration is meant to fortify our hope. Peter, from his own weakness, exclaims, “Lord, it is good for us to be here”; let us say the same, even as we must descend back into the valley of tears to continue our struggle.

The nature of our struggle is captured by St. Paul’s injunction in the Epistle: “Every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor”. “This vessel”, as the Apostle says in another place, is an “earthen” one; it is fragile – we know that all too well. But it is important for us to remember the entire verse where Paul says that; he teaches: “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us”.¹ In other words, it is impossible for us to possess ourselves “in sanctification and honor” without God’s help. We have only our human weakness; we must avail of his divine power.

The Collect of this Holy Mass expresses these truths with admirable brevity: “O God, who seest that we are wholly destitute of strength, keep us within and without: that we may be defended in body from all adversity: and cleansed in mind from evil thoughts”. Indeed, with the psalmist, we can repeat each day the words of the Introit: “To thee, O Lord, I have lifted up my soul: in thee, my God, I trust: let me not blush for shame”. We have been ashamed many times – or we should have been, for sin should always cause us to feel shame before our Lord. But he tells us, “arise, fear not” – as he also comforted Peter, James, and John.

Yes, they were filled with fear in that moment of glory, but Christ lifted them up and led them to press on. He offers that same hope to us during this favorable time of Lent. We learn from St. Paul that “the will of God” is “[our] sanctification”. The Lord wants us to be pure and he alone can make that happen. The Transfiguration shows us the beauty of a soul that is totally clean. That glory is not only for our Blessed Lord, but for us all, as well. Being in the state of sanctifying grace, staying in it, and ever growing in it must be our constant aim. And should we ever fall out of it through sin, we should run to be washed clean anew.

The Offertory Antiphon is one of my favorite verses that recurs in the liturgy periodically throughout the year: “I shall meditate on thy commandments, which I have greatly loved; and I shall lift up my hands to your commandments, in which I have delighted”. Meditating on the Lord’s commands is one of the surest ways of examining our consciences with respect to the past and counting the cost of discipleship with respect to the future. Hopefully we are all making regular and good use of the Sacrament of Confession; but this Lent would also be a fine time for a deeper, more extensive self-inventory, with the holy resolutions that might flow from it.

For what, after all, does it really mean to lift up our hands to the Lord’s commands, as the antiphon said? The gesture speaks for itself: besides being one of worship, it is also one of humble recognition – for we see that our hands are empty. Again, as the Collect said, “we are wholly destitute of strength”. We are but earthen vessels; we turn to the Lord, begging that he may perfect the work he has begun in us, that we may live in sanctification and honor. Do not miss the opportunity that this blessed time of grace presents: examine and repent from the past – yes; but also carefully prepare for the future. Christ says to us, also: “arise, fear not”!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

¹ 2 Corinthians 4:7.