

You have given us access to our Father's house

2nd Sunday of Lent – Cycle A

GN 12:1-4A, PS 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22, 2 TM 1:8B-10, MT 17:1-9



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Good morning. We gather today on the second Sunday of Lent to hear Matthew's account of the Transfiguration. The description of the cloud contributes to the rich imagery. The clouds that we read about in the bible are rarely related to weather. When the Israelites wander in the desert, they are guided by a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. The cloud represents God's presence but also His hiddenness. The bright cloud, in today's reading conceals the face of God yet we know His presence because He declares Jesus His Son in whom He is well pleased. God is knowable but hidden. We can see God's creation, we marvel at His handiwork, but God himself remains hidden from view. The hiddenness of God is part of the mystery. God is hidden yet present in the Transfiguration and all of the moments of our lives. We will brush up against this mystery time and again.

From the Cathedral of St. Peter and Paul in Nantes, France comes a story about Brother Thaddeus who makes his home there. He is now in his 80's with a snow-white beard and hair drawn back into a ponytail. One of his responsibilities to the community is to look after the beehives. One afternoon he returned from the hives with several frames of honeycomb. With a hot knife, he sliced the wax cap and spun the comb in the extractor. His efforts yielded over a liter of honey. Taking the honeycomb from the centrifuge, he washed it and set it aside. It would later be melted and formed into candles for the cathedral. The afternoon gave way to evening and Thaddeus climbed the steps to his third floor room. A single window looked upon a bed and a small desk that held some papers, a candle and crucifix. Lighting the candle against the dusk, he prayed vespers alone that evening. Thaddeus found his real communication with God was between the words and thoughts of his prayer.

He smiled thinking of the 46th psalm, “Be still and know that I am God.” He quieted himself once again. After some time, he found himself looking past the candle and out the window to the lake below. There he saw a familiar couple. Weather permitting they were there most nights. They were older. Thinking of his own years, he smiled at how ‘older’ can be such a relative term. There was a cane leaning against the bench. The man stood behind the woman and encircled her with his arms. She seemed to rest in his embrace as they admired the sunset on the lake. Thaddeus noticed that they moved ever so slightly in an unspoken soul-dance. Thaddeus wondered of their lives together. Had they borne children? Had they always enjoyed good health? What fed their love for each other? What brought them to this lake night after night?

Thaddeus drifted with these questions and the candle flickered its shadows and light. With a stroke of insight he understood, ‘their love is like the candle.’ A candle is consumed; the beeswax is spent in the process of giving light. This couple gave to each other the precious gift of their time. The time and attention shared is the fuel for their love, a beautiful light for all to see. Their soul-dance touches the great mystery in which God is hidden. Thaddeus imagined God speaking to the couple, “You are my children in whom I am pleased.”

The years teach us about mystery in a way that the busyness of the days and months cannot. Jesus teaches us how to pray and enter the mystery. In the soul-dance of loving God and neighbor, we are touched by our Father’s unbounded love. Like Jesus, we are transfigured by that love. In the Transfiguration event, Jesus allows his disciples and us to join him in prayer and to touch the mystery. He has given us access to our Father’s house.

As the couple prepared to leave that evening, the gentleman handed his cane to his wife. He slowly bent down and tied her shoelace that had come undone. Taking her hand, he steadied himself and slowly stood, taking his place by her side.

Lent is a time of sacrifice. Perhaps our finest offering is to give freely of our time to one another. By taking the time to tie a shoelace or by taking the time to listen, we brush up against the great mystery of God with us.

May the candles around our altar be a Lenten reminder. As we see them grow shorter from week to week, know that they give light through their diminishment.

Like the couple in our story, there exists between Jesus and God a Sacred and Holy Spirit of love. In receiving the Eucharist we touch the great mystery that is the soul-dance of life.

References

All scripture quotations are taken from;. (1987). *The New American Bible, Revised edition*. USCCB.

As always, I welcome your questions and comments. My email is fsila@sttomskazoo.org. (n.d.).

Note: The character of Brother Thaddeus loosely follows my memories of a priest that I met in Nantes, France. The age was about the same. When Father would don his chasuble, he would then have to reach in back to free his ponytail and likewise his long white beard. Father's English was as limited as my French, but we did manage to share morning prayer and Mass with his community. Walking back from morning Mass, the bakeries were just opening and the air was fragrant with fresh baked goods. "Yes, I will have one of those and one of those and..."