

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Year C: Gen 15:5-12, 17-18; Ps 27; Phil 3:17—4:1; Lk 9:28b-36

March 13, 2022

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Every year, on the Second Sunday of Lent, we hear in the Gospel the account of the Transfiguration. It was a vision of Christ in heavenly glory, given to the Apostles, Peter, James and John, to sustain them with hope, as they were about to witness Christ's terrible Passion. It was a vision of what lies on the other side of the Cross and on the other side of this life for those who are faithful, and it's a vision that's good for all of us to keep in mind, as we go through life and through this season of Lent.

The season of Lent reminds us of the purpose of our lives, which is to grow in virtue and to seek ever deeper communion with God, who is the origin and goal of our lives. Lent reminds us that we have been redeemed by Christ, and as a result, we can now strive for life with God in Heaven. The Scripture readings for Mass during Lent also help us to beware of certain pitfalls in life. They warn us of things to avoid, as we strive for the life of glory that Christ manifested in His Transfiguration.

In the second reading today, from the Letter to the Philippians, St. Paul gives us one of those warnings. He says that some people act like "enemies of the cross of Christ." He writes, "*For many, as I have often told you and now tell you even in tears, conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ.*"

What does it mean to be an enemy of the cross of Christ? It means to reject and oppose what the Cross stands for, or at least to refuse to be inspired by the Cross. There are probably many different ways that someone could be an enemy of the Cross of Christ, but for now we can focus on at least three ways. If we understand what the Cross represents, then we can understand what it means to be an enemy, or opponent, of the Cross.

First, the Cross represents self-denial. On the Cross, Christ offered His life as a sacrifice to make atonement for our sins. He understood that the human race had forfeited God's offer of eternal life by the disobedience and rebellion of the Fall, and He was compensating for that disobedience by an act of perfect obedience. But this obedience required Him to deny Himself and offer His own life. It was a heroic act of self-denial for all the world to see, and one that the world has never forgotten, thanks to the Church. And so, if the Cross represents self-denial, one way to be an enemy of the Cross is to insist on self-assertion and

self-indulgence. As St. Paul says of the enemies of the Cross, “*Their God is their stomach; their glory is in their ‘shame.’ Their minds are occupied with earthly things.*” It seems that he was speaking of those who refuse to deny themselves and exalt rather in self-indulgence. So, the warning for us is to beware of seeing this life as a chance and an opportunity only to indulge in what we enjoy. If we resist every invitation and opportunity to practice self-denial, we can become an enemy of the cross.

The Cross also represents forgiveness and love of enemies. From the Cross, Jesus said, “*Father, forgive them, they know not what they do*” (Lk 23:34). He was praying for the very ones who were killing Him. In His preaching, He had said, “*For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. ... But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful*” (Lk 6:32, 35, 36). So, if we hesitate to love our enemies or those who hurt us, we risk becoming enemies of the Cross of Christ. We might think that we are entitled to withhold love for those who hurt us, but if we do, we are not following the way of the Cross, which means we are not heading for the life of glory that lies on the other side. We reach the glory of life with Christ only by going through the way of the Cross, and the Cross represents forgiveness and love of enemies.

And lastly, the Cross represents the decision to respond to evil with good. It was evil and the malice of men that put Jesus on the Cross, and yet He responded to this evil only with goodness. He did not lash out or respond with violence. If we follow the way of the Cross, it means we refuse to do what is wrong, even if others do wrong to us. For example, – and until recently, it would have been an unimaginable example – in a war, if one side bombs a children’s hospital, the Cross of Christ says you could never do the same to retaliate. Evil never justifies evil in response. And whenever we give in to the temptation to respond to evil with evil, we become an enemy of the Cross of Christ. As St. Paul wrote to the Romans, “*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*” (Rom 12:21).

So, practicing self-denial by resisting self-indulgence, forgiving our enemies by not holding grudges and resentments, and responding to evil with good are three ways we follow the example of the Cross and aim for the glory of Heaven. And each of these three ways of embracing the Cross can be a good goal and resolution for these days of spiritual training in Lent. The Cross is the way to Heaven. As St. Paul said, “*[O]ur citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.*”