

**March 17, 2019 – (GA) Second Sunday in Lent (St. Patrick's day)
Gen: 15:5-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Phil: 3:17(20)-4:1; Luke 9:28b-36**

The scriptures abound with the imagery of lightness and darkness, from the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation. And we can hardly hold normal everyday conversations without using words that invoke implicit references to sight or light. I used the word "imagery," for example. Today's scripture passages also focus on light...witness the word "focus!" You may not be aware of this but we are bathed at all times and in all spaces in light, some of which we can see...that is, detect with your eyes. The technical term for light is "electromagnetic radiation." Its primary source is the sun. Without the sun we would be in nearly complete darkness. Indeed, without the sun we would not exist. It is easy to see theological themes here.

The appearance of light in the form of the sun, the moon, and the stars is part of the creation story in Genesis. In our passage from Genesis, the stars are used by God to describe the covenant God desired to form with Abram. "Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can" God tells Abram. The Psalmist says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation" and this comports well with the physical notion that light carries energy and has transformative power. St. Paul, in our reading to the Philippians, speaks of citizenship in heaven, awaiting the transformation of our earthly bodies into "glorified bodies" by the power possessed by the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is in our Gospel passage that we witness the transformation or transfiguration of Jesus of Nazareth on the mountain peak.

Luke reports, "While he (Jesus) was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white." Notice the implicit references to light and sight. Peter, James and John see him in conversation with Moses and Elijah, two other figures of Hebraic history

who had transformative encounters with God. Throughout human history many individuals have had such transformative “peak experiences” where God, in some form, is encountered. For me what comes to mind are the Celtic “thin places” of Iona in Scotland and Lindisfarne in Northumbria, and the experience of the English Romantic-age poet William Wordsworth while walking near the ruins of the medieval Cistercian monastery of Tintern Abbey in Wales. A favorite fragment of the poem he composed there in 1798, speaks to a mystical transformative encounter I am trying to describe:

*And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns...*

These places I have been privileged to visit and experience. Most recently, I was fortunate to visit Iceland where God, through the actions of the sun (our star), but also through the creative action of the Son Jesus Christ, graces us with the naked raw power and beauty of nature in the form of such things as the Northern lights, giant waterfalls, enormous glaciers, and lava tunnels carved out by erupting volcanoes. Peak sensory experiences that, for me, serve as reminders of God’s presence. Indeed, they are the face of God – the face we can see if we seek God. No wonder Peter, on that mountain top with Jesus, said, “It is good to be here!” He was really saying, “Let’s stay and never return.”

I am sure that crossed my mind in Iceland. Alas, lack of infinite money, and my love for my children and grandchildren, and, oh yes, something about solemn monastic vows, meant I could not set up a tent to stay.

But one does not have to travel to Iceland to sense the presence of God. Nor does one have to wait for our transformation to heavenly bodies in the world to come. The Psalmist says, “I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.” God is present everywhere – like electromagnetic radiation from the sun, the light of God bathes all time and all space. Yet, we have to tune our eyes to see God...and...our ears to hear God. A little later on in the same poem Wordsworth says,

*...all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear...*

Sight and sound. Sensory input. Luke tells us the voice of God was heard on the mountain, amidst the cloud that frightened Peter, James, and John – “This is my chosen son; listen to him.”

So, i encourage you during this Lenten season to seek a transformative experience. How? Seek the light of God, from whence comes our salvation, and listen to Christ Jesus, who is present to us in prayer, in nature, and in others. God is present with us here and now. Let us say with Peter, “Lord, it is good to be here!”

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