

Second Sunday of Lent C  
Gn 15: 5-12,17-18; Ph 3:17-4:1, Lk 9: 28b-36

Today's Gospel presents us with a mysterious story. In order to understand the events recounted here, we need to return in history to Mount Sinai and the Exodus account. We're told that Jesus went up on a mountain, just as Moses went up on Mount Sinai during the Exodus. There he heard the voice of God coming out of a cloud, as Moses also experienced at Mount Sinai. Moses and Elijah, who in Old Testament times had climbed Mt Sinai in search of God, appeared with Jesus. As the story continues (progresses), Moses and Elijah are seen discussing with Jesus his return to the Father, since his impending death would soon take place in Jerusalem.

But there is another reference implied here too, and that is to Christian baptism. We're told at Jesus' Baptism there was also a cloud and the voice of the Father was heard saying the same words, "*This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.*" The meaning of this mysterious story of Jesus' Transfiguration is to be found first of all in the Exodus events, when God addressed Moses and the Israelites upon a mountain out of a cloud, and also in the baptism of Jesus, when he went down in the waters of the Jordan and the Holy Spirit came upon him. Jesus' baptism was a kind of exodus – it was a passage through water in which the Father and the Spirit made contact with him. According to St. Luke, Jesus' coming death in Jerusalem would be a kind of exodus too.

Why was it so important to Matthew, Mark and Luke to put the story of Jesus' transfiguration within the context of Exodus and baptism?

They were writing for the early Christians and the writers wanted the Christians to see themselves as a new exodus people, and their baptism as a kind of transfiguration – a call to leave behind slavery to sin and enter the freedom of God's children.

That mystery had found expression in their lives when they first responded to the invitation to believe, and then passed through the waters of baptism to a new life of discipleship – a passage that had only been possible because of Jesus' death and resurrection.

It is no wonder that many New Testament stories are full of water and mountain symbolism. We see it in the waters of the pool of Siloam that healed crippled people, in the waters of the well beside which Jesus sat down with the Samaritan woman to offer her new life, and in the water at the wedding feast of Cana, symbolizing the Old Covenant, that Jesus turned into the

wine that symbolized the abundant blessings of the New Covenant (Testament). We see it too, in the Sermon on the Mount; on the mountain of the Transfiguration, the Mount of Olives, and the times Jesus climbed a mountain to pray. Water and mountain symbolism call to mind (evoke) the liberating waters of the Exodus and the mysterious presence of God who revealed himself to human beings on a mountain in the Old Testament.

Just as Jesus' transfiguration was a preparation for his exodus, his passage back to the Father, so also our transfiguration in Baptism represents our entry into a Christian discipleship that must likewise be a kind of exodus – a leaving behind of the things that make slaves of us, greed, lust, violence, prejudice, love of power or addictions, and the many false messages of modern culture that pretend to point the way to instant happiness; an exodus that is the beginning of our passage back to the Father. The Transfiguration story should get us to reflect, as it probably did the early Christians, on the meaning of our baptism. It challenges us to ask ourselves if we have continued on that baptismal journey towards the Father, or if we have taken a detour in another direction. When we are willing to focus seriously on the exodus journey, we too, will be changed, as Jesus was on the mountain.

- Fr. Stephen Lattner, O.S.B.