

Second Sunday of Lent, Year C
Gen 15:5-12, 17-18
Ps 27 *passim*
Phil 3:17-4:1
Lk 9:28b-36

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In our second reading this morning, from St. Paul's letter to the Church at Philippi, he confronts those whom he calls "the enemies of the cross of Christ." We're going to look more deeply into that phrase, "the enemies of the cross of Christ."

In this third year of the 3-year Lectionary cycle, the Church focuses on the Gospel of Luke. Last week we saw Jesus fasting in the desert, where he was tempted by the devil. The devil offered Jesus power and glory, on the condition that Jesus follow him and worship him. Satan promised glory, and today we see the real glory of Jesus revealed.

In Luke's account Jesus's face glowed, meaning that the glory came from within Jesus himself, whereas the two companions merely reflected God's glory. Jesus was like the sun, which is the source of its own light, and Moses' and Elijah's glory is like moonlight, which is a reflection of the sun's light. Moses and Elijah represent the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament; Moses represents the Law and Elijah the prophets. So, Jesus is shown in continuity – in conversation – with the Law and the Prophets. And the text tells us that their conversation was about the "exodus" that Jesus was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. They talked therefore about Jesus's crucifixion and death.

The glory of Jesus is inextricably linked with his crucifixion and death.

In St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians [1 Cor 1:23, 2:2], he says that we preach Christ Jesus and him crucified. We cannot begin to understand Jesus except through the filter of his cross. In the passage I mentioned at the beginning, St. Paul laments that the Philippians, or many of them at least, have started to behave like "enemies of the cross of Christ." Not "enemies of Christ," mind you, but "enemies of the cross of Christ." Unless we place the cross front and center, we run the risk of dismissing Jesus, of not taking him seriously enough. You hear nonbelievers sometimes describe Jesus as a great religious figure, as a wonderful teacher, as a fine moral philosopher, but nothing more. Well, phooey! Jesus proclaimed himself to be the way, the truth, and the life. He proclaimed himself to be the Son of God in a way that nobody else can claim: he revealed himself to be God, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity. In Jesus God lowered himself to become one of us, to enter into human culture and human history . . . and to lead a life of perfect integrity. Jesus did not have to end up on the cross. He could have cut a deal. He could have compromised. Except then he would have had to give up his integri-

ty. [*pointing to the crucifix*] That is the price of integrity, . . . the price Jesus had to pay and – in one form or another – the price all of us who follow Jesus have to pay.

Jesus either was who he said he was, or he was a lunatic or a fraud. Those are the three options: the genuine article, a lunatic, or a fraud.

So, why does the Church have us consider Jesus's transfigured glory on the Second Sunday of Lent? Jesus's road to Jerusalem led to the cross; Jesus died on the cross. But that's not where he ended up; that's not the end of the story. On the other side of the Cross lies glory . . . for Jesus, . . . and for us.

The lesson of this Second Sunday of Lent is that glory is on the far side of the cross. The path to glory leads through the cross. Not around it, not over it or under it, but through it.

Like us, our Protestant brothers and sisters preach Christ Jesus and him crucified. They display the cross in their churches. But their cross lacks the figure of the dying Jesus, what we call the corpus. A Protestant friend told me one time, "You know, Bob, he's not up there. He's not up there anymore. He is risen."

There are, I believe, two reasons the Catholic Church holds so firmly to the practice of showing the corpus on the cross. The first reason has to do with time as God experiences it. For God there is no past, present, or future; there is only the eternal now. God experiences all moments in time simultaneously. But that does not mean that each moment in time is equally important or valuable. In the eternal now one moment rises to the top. And that is Jesus hanging on the cross. It is that moment, when Jesus hung upon the cross, that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass unites us with.

The second reason is less complicated and more straightforward. It's the answer I gave my Protestant friend at the time, and it's the point on which I bring this homily to a close. Yes, Jesus is risen and reigns in glory; he no longer hangs on the cross. But *we do*: every faithful Christian, each in her or his own way, hangs on the cross – trusting in Jesus's word and therefore hoping for the glory that awaits us on the far side.