

First the battle, then the glory

THE GOOD NEWS

GOD'S WORD IN EVERYDAY LIVING

By Father Paul Turner



THE TRANSFIGURATION of Jesus is no easier for us to figure out than it was for Peter, James, and John. Peter, seeing the vision, blurted out that they should build three tents on the site. That suggestion went over like the proverbial lead balloon, but then no one had a better idea.

This Gospel forms part of the ancient tradition of Lent and comes to us every year on the second Sunday of the season. This year we hear Luke's version (9:28-36).

Our catechumens and the faithful have already been introduced into the penitential life of Christ with the first Suriciay's story of the temptation in the desert. Today we meet Moses and Elijah, both desert foxes like Jesus. But our vision is lifted beyond the wilderness and into glory.

These first two Sundays summarize the whole goal of Lent: to endure suffering and to attain glory.

MOSES AND ELIJAH bring further significance to the event. God had promised to raise up a prophet like Moses (Deut 18:18) and Elijah's return was long expected (Sirach 48:10). Now here they stood again with the prophet-Messiah who shares their place in history. Moses and Elijah themselves had experienced God on a mountain (Ex 24:15-16 and 1 Kgs 19:8). Each had anointed a successor, Joshua (Deut 34:9) and Elisha (2 Kgs 2:15). Jesus' successors knelt before him as the vision unfolded.

The topic of conversation between Moses and

Elijah is Jesus' upcoming "departure" in Jerusalem. That word in Greek is *exodus*, and it refers us right back to Moses, who led Israel's "departure" from slavery into freedom.

Luke significantly closes this passage with the information that the three apostles observed silence after the experience. In this silence we find the awesome mystery of God and the reverent attitude of disciples who have drawn close to its wonder.

THIS ENTIRE passage shares a motif with the temptation of Christ which may not be readily apparent. The Gospels pair up the baptism of Jesus with his temptation. They also pair up the transfiguration with the cure of a demoniac child (Lk 9:37-43). These two pairings share much in common. In the baptism and the transfiguration, the Father reveals the glory of the Son and speaks from heaven, "This is my beloved Son" (cf. Lk 3:22 and 9:35). In Luke's version, Jesus prays in both episodes (cf. 3:21 and 9:29). In the temptation and the cure of the demoniac, Jesus goes into battle with Satan. This week we hear a story of glory; last week we heard one of battle.

Some religious artists depicted the two stories together. In fact, Raphael painted the transfiguration with the cure of the demoniac in the foreground. The original is in the Vatican Museum, and a mosaic copy is in St. Peter's in Rome. But you can also find a reproduction in Kansas City. Make a visit to Our Lady of Peace Church in northeast Kansas City and you'll see one of the real artistic treasures in our Diocese. Above the altar is a stained glass reproduction of this great work by Raphael, and you'll find both the transfiguration and the possessed child enshrined.

Early on, the season of Lent comforts us with the vision of glory which awaits the faithful Christian. As surely as Moses and Elijah heralded a promised land, so too does Lent.

Father Paul Turner is pastor of St. John Francis Regis Parish, Kansas City. □

Daily Scripture Readings

First Sunday of Lent Sunday, March 5

Deuteronomy 26:4-10
Psalms 91:1-2, 10-15
Romans 10:8-13
Luke 4:1-13

Monday, March 6

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18
Psalms 19:8-10, 15
Matthew 25:31-46

Tuesday, March 7

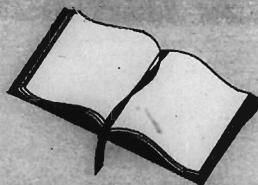
Isaiah 55:10-11
Psalms 34:4-7, 16-19
Matthew 6:7-15

Wednesday, March 8

Jonah 3:1-10
Psalms 51:3-4, 12-13, 18-19
Luke 11:29-32

Thursday, March 9

Esther c:12, 14-16, 23-25
Psalms 138:1-3, 7-8
Matthew 7:7-12



Friday, March 10

Ezekiel 18:21-28
Psalms 130:1-8
Matthew 5:20-26

Saturday, March 11

Deuteronomy 26:16-19
Psalms 119:1-2, 4-5, 7-8
Matthew 5:43-48

Second Sunday in Lent Sunday, March 12

Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18
Psalms 27:1, 7-9, 13-14
Philippians 3:17 - 4:1
Luke 9:28-36