

There's an old cartoon that shows the Blessed Virgin doing her laundry in a wooden tub. Another woman of Nazareth walks up, completely dismayed, and asks, "Mary, how do you get your wash so immaculate?"

Today we meet Jesus not just with his clothes dazzlingly white, but his entire appearance as well. "Transfiguration" is such a difficult term that when Luke describes this scene, he never uses the word, but Matthew does. In this vision, Peter, James, and John see Jesus becoming one with light. We hear this story every year on the second Sunday of Lent. In a way, the first two Sundays mirror the last two Sundays of this season. On the first Sunday we meet Jesus in the desert, fighting with Satan. On Palm Sunday we meet Jesus on the cross, fighting with death. On the second Sunday we meet Jesus in his transfigured glory; and on Easter Sunday we meet him in the glory of his resurrection.

The first two Sundays of Lent also treat two themes central to the season and to the whole Christian life: fasting and prayer. Since Jesus fasts for forty days, we imitate him for forty days of Lent. A real fast gives us a constant reminder of the holy season we're in, day in and day out, at home, at work, and at church. Prayer, too, brings us into the presence of God and helps us prepare for the life of grace.

The transfiguration reminds me of prayer because the apostles enter God's presence and see Jesus better. Their prayer is very simple: Jesus invites them to the mountain, they follow, and simply witness the events which unfold. Often we wish we could pray better; we wish we could eliminate distractions; we wish we could concentrate more; we wish we could give prayer more time. We expect ourselves to do the work and to develop the skills. But in its simplest form, prayer is something that comes to the believer; it's not something we work at. It's letting Jesus lead us to the mountain. It's trying less, and yielding more. In that state of surrender we meet God, just as Jesus did on the cross.

Fasting and prayer go together. Our fast reminds us of our addictions, and our weakness prepares us for prayer. There we find union with Christ, whose light guides us always.