March 01, 2015
2nd Sunday in Lent –
“God has a Plan for Each of Us – Are We Listening?”
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Gospel: Mark 9:2-10
Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them. Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified. Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; from the cloud came a voice, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.” Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them.

As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant.

HOMILY
SURPRISE!!
I’ll bet you were surprised when I just yelled, “SURPRISE!!” Life is so filled with everyday events that we expect to happen, or are generally uneventful, that we tend to remember things that surprise us. If I put a ladder next to the altar and gave my homily from there, you’d probably remember that for a long time – you might not remember what I said, but you’d remember what I did. If I gave a 60 second homily this morning, you might say that I’m just about done now … but you’d probably remember it. If I gave a 60 minute homily, you’d be surprised – and maybe fade out after a while … you get the picture.

Take a look back on events that you can truly remember over the years, and you might agree that the ones you can best recall would include those that most surprised you. Years ago, we had an electrical failure in the Northeast U.S. – a widespread blackout, and it lasted anywhere from several hours to a few days, depending where you lived. For some time afterwards, a common ice-breaker of a question was, “Where were you when the lights went out?” I suppose if you were stuck on an elevator somewhere, you would remember exactly what you were doing. I’m sure there have been good events in your life also, surprising events – maybe a surprise birthday party, a marriage proposal, an unexpected job promotion – and you might remember them quite well. The more we are surprised, the more we might remember the event and details around it. Another way to look at it is to say that we have a plan on how our life is to go, and when it changes from that plan, we are more likely to remember that change.

Last weekend, my wife and I met our parish’s newest RCIA candidates at an informal gathering, and I recalled some events of my life that got me to the diaconate, and ultimately, to St. Louis, just 30 months ago. I’ll save the details for another time, but when I was planning for the future back in my late teens, I had a desire to work by myself in an office or lab, without much interaction with others. Well, God had other plans for me (as you can see now!), and He has plans for each and every one of you. Looking back on events in my life that happened, and how I reacted, I can see how the hand of God helped to show me the path, the plan, to follow – surprises from God, but altogether helping me on my faith and life journey.
God has a plan for each and every one of us – are we listening?

Looking at our Gospel passage for today, from Mark, some context will help in our understanding. The Transfiguration experience follows several events that happened together, where Jesus’ identity and anticipated future are first revealed to His disciples. Let’s look at it from a past, present and future perspective, just before the Transfiguration:

- The past – Peter and the other disciples had been following Jesus for 3 years, they had come to love Him, and saw His love not only for them but for all others – they might follow Him anywhere.

- The present – again, all happening just before this Transfiguration experience:
  - Peter boldly professes Jesus to be the long-awaited Messiah, but one who was also a military and political figure.
  - Jesus then reveals His anticipated rejection by the religious leaders of the time, followed by His suffering and death, followed by His resurrection after three days.
  - Peter rebukes Jesus for saying this – it didn’t fit into his plan – and he is then reprimanded by Jesus.
  - The final straw happens when Jesus announces to all that to be His disciple, one must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Jesus.

- The future – well, SURPRISE! Talk about a change in plans, a change from expectations on the disciples’ part. There must have been confusion, maybe some panic, for them. What to do? How does the past fit in, what to do next, what will the future be for them NOW?

So, that’s the context for today’s Transfiguration story. The disciples are still trying to sort out those previous events, and they continue to follow Jesus for 6 days, before Peter, James, and John are led up this high mountain by Jesus. Let’s return to a past, present and future perspective:

- The past – Peter and the others knew their Scriptures:
  - They knew that both Moses and Elijah had each ascended a mountain to communicate with God.
  - They knew that the face of Moses was brilliantly white when he came down from the mountain, and that no-one knew where he had been buried, if he had even died.
  - They knew that Elijah was swept up into heaven on a chariot, and was to return before the so-called end times.

- And now, here it is …
  - The present – SURPRISE! Jesus’ appearance changed, He was transfigured, and His clothes became dazzling white.
  - The present – SURPRISE! again – Elijah and Moses appear, and converse with Jesus.
  - The present – Peter, James and John are terrified, and don’t know what to say! But they’re also ecstatic – “it is good that we are here,” says Peter – he wants this moment to last, to last for a long time, and offers to build them tents, to keep them there.
  - And then, the present – SURPRISE! one more time. A cloud overshadows them and they hear the voice of God, “This is my beloved Son. LISTEN to Him.”

- The future – Jesus had just been talking to His disciples about their present, and their future – about Jesus’ anticipated suffering, death and resurrection, and their taking up their own cross, to be His disciples. And He will continue talking about this in the days ahead. The disciples need to LISTEN to Jesus.
The combination of events on the mountain of Transfiguration affirms the past, and ties the past with the present for Peter, James, and John, in preparation for future glory with God in heaven. There’s continuity among the past, present, and future.

God has a plan for each and every one of us – are we listening?

We each have a past, present, and future on our faith and life journey. The events of the Transfiguration were meant for Jesus’ disciples, and they are meant for us, also. By hearing of that first event through the Word of God, we also become witnesses. We are all called to LISTEN to Jesus! So, let me summarize that important point for us, that continuity among past, present, and future, for us: aware of our past, following Jesus in our present life, we have hope and anticipation to share in God’s glory in eternal life, our future, in heaven.

Aware of our past – we have heard the Scriptures, the Word of God; we have heard the teachings of the Church handed down from the early Church Fathers all the way to today; and by our Baptism, we are children of God, sharing in His spiritual life. Looking back on our life and our faith journey, can we see instances where God helped us through confusion, through clouds of our own making, through misconceptions of people and ideas, through ill-fated plans that were not meant to be? Looking back, can we see where the hand of God helped shape our journey to get us where we are today? And, just as importantly, can we see instances where we rebelled against and maybe even turned against God’s help?

The present – following Jesus in our present life – we each have a plan, don’t we. And then there are those surprises and other events that come along to disrupt that plan – some just pesky nuisances, some downright serious – surprises that cloud our judgment, distract our thoughts, sway our commitments. God tries to help us with His own surprises – to help us get back on track, but we need to listen, listen to His Word, pay attention to His guidance. As a pertinent example, here we are on the Second Sunday of Lent already, one-fourth of the way through Lent, Holy Week begins in just 4 weeks! Lent certainly isn’t a surprise, but maybe we consider it a distraction from everyday life. How quickly do we want this Lent to be over, to get to Easter, maybe a Spring vacation away from school, away from the snow, maybe a reunion with the extended family for Easter dinner? But, by wishing Lent away, or even ignoring it, we would be missing on a tremendous opportunity to prepare ourselves for a better and more meaningful Easter experience, a more meaningful celebration of the Resurrection of Our Lord. Look around – take advantage of the many learning opportunities being offered here, such as multiple Bible Study programs or the Lighthouse CDs in the Narthex. Come to the tri-parish retreat which begins tomorrow, given by Bishop Matthew Clark, and bring a friend or family member. Refresh your soul – take advantage of the Day of Penitence being offered again this year, or gently encourage someone you know who silently wishes to come home to their faith but doesn’t know where to begin. Be an active part of the Triduum. Matthew Kelly, in a weekly series you can get on e-mail, encourages each of us to make this Lent our best one ever. Why not try? Most importantly, LISTEN for God’s guidance. …<pause>… As a more general example, we broadly speak of being with God in heaven after we pass. After all, our faith teaches us that our ultimate future is to be with God and share in His eternal life. We don’t like to speak of suffering and maybe even carrying a cross in life, do we – it’s easier to imagine a life that is completely comfortable. But, surprises happen, to us and to others, and we all do have crosses to bear in life, and at different times in life. We are encouraged to LISTEN to the voice of God to help us through. And, to help others through their crosses, their sufferings. It’s what we do as disciples of Christ.

The future? We have hope and anticipation to share in God’s glory in eternal life, our future, in heaven. The Transfiguration gives us a glimpse of our resurrected Lord, and, to quote the Catechism, “a foretaste of Christ’s glorious coming when He ‘will change our lowly body to be like His glorious body.’” God has a plan for each and every one of us – there is a continuity among our past, present and future – are we listening?