

Second Sunday of Lent Year A 2007

1. Whenever I work with people
 - a. who are becoming Catholic
 - b. or returning to the practice of the Catholic faith,
 - c. Sooner or later they say something to me.
 - i. “Its hard to be Catholic!”
2. Very often these people think that it is hard to be Catholic
 - a. because they are coming to the faith late in life.
 - i. They envy “cradle Catholics”, thinking you practice the faith with an ease that will always elude them.
 - b. IF only they knew, eh?
 - i. They are not the only ones who find it hard to be Catholic
 - ii. Many of us do. And for many reasons.
3. WE hear in the news paper about the closings of schools, the consolidation of churches, the diminishing number of priests and the aging of our religious sisters
 - a. And we think that if only they would let married men be priests, if only they would let women be priests, if only thy would more people be priests then there would not need to be so many closings;
 - b. And yet we know that our church will not let that happen; this makes others so angry they leave, and we are tempted to do the same
4. We walk out the door of our homes each day
 - a. Past Mormon missionaries and Muslim mosques
 - b. Past the abortion clinic and in vitro fertilization center
 - i. We greet the unwed mother who lives down the street, the man who we know is getting a divorce, and our next -door neighbor and his new boyfriend
 - c. And even if we are not sure what our church might say about these issues,
 - i. We know it says something, and we know it is increasingly ignored,
 - ii. And we feel tempted to do the same,
 - (1) because it is hard to be a Catholic.
5. We wish for some assurance that the church we are members of, the faith we share and the God we worship are really true;
 - a. then it would not be so hard to be a Catholic.
6. We think, of course, that in past ages it was easier to be a Catholic.
 - a. But it certainly wasn’t for the Christians at the time Saint Luke lived.
 - b. They would worship in their local synagogue,
 - i. Only to be accused of being blasphemers,
 - ii. Because they worshiped Jesus as God
 - c. They would visit their relatives and friends
 - i. Only to be labeled “abominations”
 - ii. Because they, as Christians, ate with unclean gentiles.
 - d. They would walk into town
 - i. Only to be arrested by soldiers as traitors

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- ii. Because they were members of that seditious organization called the Church, which called a crucified criminal its God.
 - e. In such an atmosphere of hatred and persecution, it was not merely hard to be a follower of Christ; it was nearly impossible.
- 7. The people in Luke's day yearned for the assurance that their faith was true.
 - a. Thus Luke tells a story where three of Jesus disciples,
 - i. Peter, James and John, were given that assurance.
 - ii. Jesus takes them up a mountain.
 - iii. His clothes are illuminated
 - iv. The place is filled with light
 - v. Jesus is glorified
 - vi. Moses and Elijah appear along side him, symbolic of the Law and the prophets
 - vii. A divine voice from heaven proclaims Jesus as God's Son.
- 8. This is the moment of transfiguration; when Peter James and John got to see Jesus in all his glory.
 - a. This is the moment of assurance every Christian in Luke's day and ours for that matter would long to get as well.
 - i. For we think that if we saw what they saw, well then being a Catholic would be easy. As it was for them.
- 9. But it wasn't that easy. And Luke knew it. All too well.
 - a. For that is not the only mountain in Luke's Gospel
 - b. later on there is another story about another mountain
 - i. The mount, not of transfiguration but crucifixion.
 - (1) On this mountain Jesus does not take disciples up, but is taken up by soldiers.
 - (2) On this mountain his clothes are not illuminated, they are stripped
 - (3) On this mountain the air is not filled with light but darkness
 - (4) On this mountain Jesus is not glorified, but humiliated
 - (5) On this mountain he is not flanked by Moses and Elijah but by criminals
 - (6) On this mountain Jesus IS proclaimed Son of God
 - (a) but it is by his executioners . . . not God.
 - (7) On this mountain, Jesus IS also accompanied by three disciples
 - (a) but they are the three women . . . not Peter, James and John.
 - ii. What happened to these disciples, who were on that other mountain,
 - (1) and were given the assurance that Jesus was indeed God's son
 - (a) and everything they believed about him was true?
 - iii. They abandoned him out of fear.
- 10. Lukes tale of two mountains is no accident.
 - a. Luke writes them as parallel, because he sees something that all too often we miss;

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- b. That the mountain of transfiguration and the mountain of crucifixion are really the same.
 - i. For Jesus is revealed on both for who he truly is
 - (1) He is both the fulfilment of the Law and the prophets and the forgiver of thieves
 - (2) The glorified Son of God and the vilified king of the Jews.
 - (3) And unless we see Jesus' glory also in his humiliation
- c. Then we miss seeing him for who he truly is, and lose the only assurance we truly have.
- d. That assurance that he is with us both in our moments of joy and of pain
 - i. both when we are sure of our faith as when we are doubtful
 - ii. Both when we pray with fervor "We believe in one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church"
 - iii. as when, because of scandalous behavior or difficult doctrines we are tempted to leave the Church, or far worse, simply discount it.
 - (1) Both when it is easy to be Catholic, or far more frequently, when it is difficult.
 - iv. For we can put our trust in Bibles and priests, popes and bishops which make up the church,
 - v. We can put our trust in the disciples who wrote the Bible and the apostles from whom these priests and popes and bishops descend
 - vi. We can put our trust in the fact that Peter James and John climbed the mountain and saw Jesus for who he truly is.
 - vii. But in the end, if we trust in these things, and look to them for that assurance we crave, they become sources not of that assurance, but of idolatry, because they blind us to the only assurance Luke does give.
- e. That the glorified Jesus is not only present on the mountain of transfiguration,
 - i. but ALSO the mountain of crucifixion;
- f. that he is with us not only in his mysterious presence
 - i. but also in his seeming absence.
- g. that we are most faithful
 - i. when we struggle and are challenged by our faith
 - ii. when we seek to understand it in the context of our all too human lives and of our all too human church
- h. And thus strangely enough, paradox of paradoxes
 - i. we are most Catholic precisely when it is difficult for us to be.