

Second Sunday of Lent (C), Feb. 28, 2010**Gn 15:5-12, 17-18; Ps 27:1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14.; Phil 3:17—4:1; Lk 9:28b-36****The Face of Love**

Some time ago, I had a conversation that helps me understand today's gospel a bit better. It was over dinner with a Jesuit theologian from El Salvador. His teaching and writing seeks to help the church better respond to the needs of the many poor people in El Salvador. He was also deeply involved in church response to the Salvadoran civil war. Six of the Jesuits he lived with were assassinated by the Salvadoran military for their efforts for the poor and for peace. Had he been at home the night the murders, he would have been killed also. Since then he has continued his theological teaching and writing on behalf for the poor. But the doctrinal authorities of the church are suspicious of his theology. His commitments have led to conflict with those in both political and religious power.

Some months ago, this man was visiting BC and a group of us had dinner with him. When we asked how he kept going in the face of this opposition, he slowly began speaking about his understanding of Jesus, and how Jesus deeply loved the poor and sought to bring them peace. As he spoke silence came over the table. Afterwards one of the others who had been there said our friend's face was positively glowing with love as he spoke of Jesus, of the poor, and of peace. I suspect this experience was something like the one in today's gospel.

Today's gospel is usually called the story of the Transfiguration. We could also call it the gospel of the Face of Love. Luke tells us that when Peter, James, and John heard Jesus speaking with Moses and Elijah, they saw Jesus's face changed in appearance. Jesus has gone to the mountaintop to pray. In prayer, he enters into a deep encounter with God, an encounter that causes his face to shine. Jesus's face radiates with his love for God. And God's love for him shines on Jesus face in a way that leads the disciples to say they have seen God's glory.

We also know from the context of today's reading in Luke's gospel that Jesus's face was glowing with love for his people. Like the face of my Salvadoran friend, Jesus' face shone with love for the poor and for victims of violence. Luke tells us just a few verses before today's reading that Jesus had been teaching his followers not to be ashamed of what he had been teaching them. In these teachings he had proclaimed "blessed are you poor; blessed are you peacemakers." And, like my friend from El Salvador, this love is going to get him into deep trouble with both the political and religious establishment. Jesus warns his followers that his teachings are going to lead the political and religious authorities in Jerusalem to put him to death. In today's passage, we learn that on the mountaintop Jesus is speaking with Moses and Elijah about his "exodus" or exit in Jerusalem. In other words, he is speaking to them about how his love for his people will lead to his death in Jerusalem.

But he does not hold back. With the courage that can come only from deep love, he continues his ministry even though he knows this will cost his life. A few verses after today's passage, Luke tells us that Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem." This is the face of love, eyes turned toward the Jerusalem where crucifixion awaits. It is face that radiates a love so deep that even the threat of death will not cause him to turn back.

Those of us who had dinner with our Salvadoran friend saw his face glow with love for Jesus and for the poor in his war-ravaged country. We saw the face of a love that had risked death and was ready to do so again. The apostles with Jesus on the mountain also saw the face of love. Jesus's love, though, is more radical than any simply human love. Jesus's love for us, especially for those who suffer, is total. Even when those he loves put him to death, he keeps on loving. This is love with no limits. When this kind of love shines on his face, his disciples know they are seeing the glory of God. They know that Jesus is truly God's beloved, God's chosen one, who is bringing God's unconditional love to us.

During Lent, as we reflect on the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are invited to see in Jesus's face God's unconditional love for us. As we now come to the table of the Lord, we are entering into that love. As we do so, we can only say with the disciples "Lord, it is good for us to be here."