

2nd Sunday of Lent
March 20, 2011
4 PM, 8 AM, 10 AM Liturgies

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There are two pearls of wisdom which I would like us to hold in conjunction as we explore today's gospel. The first is a paraphrase of Blessed John Henry Newman. He once wrote: "Here below on earth, to live is to change. To be perfect is to have changed often."

The second comes from Fr. Tony DeMelo, S.J. "You do not have to change in order for God to love you. But because God loves you, everything has to change."

Somewhere, in there or perhaps between there, may be the real meaning of the Transfiguration moment we share again today. But we Christians always use that "funny" word "transfiguration," and few know exactly what it means. The word transfiguration rarely appears in "secular" discourse. (Except, of course, in Harry Potter novels where at Hogwarts there is a third-year class in "Transfiguration.")

In fact, the original Greek word used by all three synoptic gospel accounts has a more common meaning. The original word used is *metamorphoó*, from which comes our English word

metamorphosis: to shift, to radically change, to be transformed. That's something we do understand—at least a little.

The word is only rarely used in the entire New Testament. Twice, St. Paul uses it, once to refer to the transformation of Jesus as he takes on the “form” of a slave in the great Philippians’ hymn (Jesus is *transformed* and takes on the appearance of a slave), and the second when Paul urges the church in Rome to be *transformed* in the renewal of their hearts and minds (Rom 12:2). (Thus ends our etymology lesson for today.)

There is a contemporary usage of this word that most younger folks would understand. If you have ever seen Star Trek or even a Harry Potter movie, you have seen people *morph* in some delightful ways. *Morph* is what's left of the fancier word metamorphosis. But it is the same word and has the same meaning. So, perhaps we could say: On that holy mountain, Jesus *morphed*. Now, the question remains: into what did he morph?

(Now for a brief sortie into scripture scholarship.) Many scholars believe that this story of transfiguration was actually a post-resurrection story transposed into Jesus’ pre-resurrection ministry. Why? To illustrate that Jesus’ whole life, death, and resurrection were about the *transformation* of this world. His life is about a changed world order being inaugurated in his life and ministry, and confirmed by his resurrection. In short, his life and death is about change, changing often, perhaps

often enough to become perfect, as Newman put it. But it's not just change for or in himself, but change for us and for the universe we live in. This transformation, or transfiguration, is about a much bigger story than we often think it is. At least that's what the first Christians thought!

So, Jesus on that holy mountain morphed into his post-resurrection form. It was a glimpse of what he would become as he is raised from the dead. Perhaps it is a glimpse of what we shall become when we join him on that final day.

Jesus being raised from the dead is not just some private vindication from God done for Jesus' own sake. It's not even primarily about proving that there can be life after death. Jesus' shining with the glory of God, and in the presence of the great prophet and the great lawgiver of Israel, is about God transforming all the ground rules of life itself. So that we live now, as St. Paul says, not as ourselves but as, and in, Christ. The whole world has morphed, *is* morphed forever. It really is up-side-down from what we usually perceive.

So why do so many of us not seem to see the change yet? Because it is hard to see the change when we are still so inundated by natural tsunamis and ecclesio-genic tsunamis in our own worlds. It is hard to *see* the change here and now—especially if you have not let *yourself* morph with Jesus.

The message for us in this story is that it is, perhaps, us who may have to change in order to

see God's changed world in the risen Christ. We need to learn to see through God's eyes. And then, perhaps, more will actually look transformed, transfigured, morphed. The world is gift—just as it is. Even if we do not always know how. The world is morphing, and it will not cease.

Morphing will continue to happen in and all around us. And there's no use pitching tents to capture it. These moments cannot be captured. They keep changing. It is God's remarkable Promise: I am with you—always. But never in the same way twice.

“You do not have to change in order for God to love you. But because God loves you, everything has to change.” Change is now the norm of creation. We stand still and preserve the present at our own peril. God is constant change, constant surprise. So much so that God becomes change-less in God's constant changing. The only constant is change! (Puzzle over that one for lunch!)

“To live here below is to change. To become perfect is to have changed often.” Now listen again to the final section of today's gospel: “And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, ‘do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.’”

But, my brothers and sisters, *he is raised from the dead.* It is time to tell the vision. And he continues to transform our whole world—if we could only see it more clearly. Maybe we just

need to let ourselves be morphed with him and in him. I suppose we could just try it for Lent.

“Look redeemed,” for God’s sake. As I’ve already told you on Ash Wednesday, that is *my* mantra

this Lent. Try it! It might surprise you. Peace!