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**2nd Sunday of Lent
February 17, 2008**

In honor of the historic moment that occurred at the Westminster Kennel Club show in Philadelphia last week, I'm sure you will want to join me in offering congratulations to that other famous Beagle, Snoopy. His pedigree has been vindicated. (You do know that a Beagle won top prize for the first time in history, don't you?)

So I'd like to start today's homily sharing with you again a moment with Snoopy's beloved, if perplexed, master, good old Charlie Brown. It is one of my favorite cartoon strips and I have used it before from this very pulpit.

Charlie Brown is lying in his bed early one morning musing to himself. He says thoughtfully: "Sometimes I wake up knowing I'm going to have a bad day, and sure enough, I have a bad day." Charlie is now sitting up in bed, and says to himself: "Sometimes I wake up thinking I'm going to have a good day, but it always turns out to be a bad day." Looking even more perplexed and now sitting on the side of his bed, he says: "How come I never wake up thinking I'm going to have a good day and then really have a good day? Or how come I never wake up thinking I'm going to have a bad day and then

have a good day?” In the end, Charlie flops back down on his bed, pulls the cover up to his neck, and says simply: “My stomach hurts.”

My brothers and sisters, we all need to anticipate having good days and then have them turn out to be actually good days. We all need to have days when things seem clear—at least for the moment. We need to have days when, even if just for a minute, we seem to understand what it’s all about. Jesus’ earliest disciples were no exception. They needed what we now call the “transfiguration moment.”

We all need transfiguration moments. And we all—like Peter, James, and John—when we have such a moment, want to capture it in time and space and hang on for dear life to that moment. Let’s build tents to have it never go away or change. That was Peter’s suggestion; that’s a good first response too! Marvelously human of him!

The church retells this story every Lent to remind us that it is important to have good days and to remember and cherish them. Lent is time to *repent*. That is a word that literally means “turn around” a bit. Turn yourself around and look carefully—look at the good times, as well as the not too good times. That’s all repent means. Let yourself have a *metanoia* (to use the Greek word for repent). And when you turn yourself around a bit, don’t just think of the

“bad days,” the bad stuff, the negative in yourself and your environment.

Remember and cherish the transfiguration moments too. They are just as important for salvation.

Each of us, I’m willing to bet, has had good days, transparent moments of God’s love and care for ourselves and those whom we love. Those days may be hard to remember sometimes, but hear the invitation to remember them today. And be grateful for the memories of transfiguration in your own life. They, too, are gifts to be savored on the journey of Lent, treasures to be shared on the path to Holy Week. That is the gift of today’s liturgy.

But, unfortunately, many of us long to *live* on the mountain top, to live continually in a transfiguration moment, to always see more clearly and more assuredly the glory of God’s Promise. But that’s not to be for any of us—Jesus included. Sometimes we can let our expectations only depress us, or convince us of our unworthiness or sinfulness.

Remember: these are *moments* of promise, *moments* of light, *moments* of grace and gift that evanesce all too quickly, and are replaced all too quickly by “the ordinary.” The dull, the drab, the straining to see or hear anything. As Gerard Manley Hopkins once phrased it: “I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.”

Interestingly, Pope Benedict echos the transitory nature of experiences like this. He said a few years ago in an Angelus homily on the Transfiguration: “No one, however, is permitted to live ‘on Tabor’ while on earth” (Tabor is the mountain on which the transfiguration is thought by some to have taken place). The Pope goes on: “Indeed human existence is a journey of faith and as such, moves ahead more in shadows than in full light, and is no stranger to moments of obscurity and also of complete darkness.”

No matter how much we long for the exaltation of transfigured moments like today’s gospel portrays, our reality is more often painted in shades of grey rather than brilliance, and is mostly obscure—when not totally opaque. That is the very nature of faith. When it seems not to be so, be cautious; you may be out of step with the vast majority of the human race—including most faithful believers.

God seems to understand. And so God, in today’s story, speaks from the cloud—as much to us as to Peter, James, and John. Especially when you cannot see the blinding light—or even a small flicker—you can always still listen. God says: “This is my Beloved Son: Listen to Him.”

The metamorphosis of Jesus that Matthew describes today (and that word, metamorphosis, by the way is the Greek word used in all the Synoptic

gospels for hat we call transfiguration) seems fleeting even for Jesus. The great law-giver, Moses, and all the great prophets of Israel represented by Elijah, chat for only a single blinding moment. And then it is all gone. But it is enough. Echos of Hopkins again: “I greet Him on the days I meet Him, and bless when I understand.” Cherish the light if you see it; but remember, you can still listen in the dark.

So remember Charlie Brown. When you are next lying perplexed in your bed—perhaps this evening or tomorrow morning—sometimes you do wake up thinking you are going to have a bad day, and you actually have a good one. So then, celebrate. Repent—turn yourself around—and be grateful. Today’s message is finally simple: Don’t forget to celebrate your very own transfiguration moments. And listen! Keep listening! That’s what Lent is all about.