

2 Lent C

February 28, 2010

Cathedral

10:00 and Noon

Theme: As what happened to Jesus, glimpses of glory sustain us as we journey within the paschal mystery

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**“Jesus...went up the mountain to pray.”** That’s how today’s Gospel starts off. St. Luke’s Gospel puts it like this: **“Jesus took Peter, John and James and went up the mountain to pray.”** No other Gospel has Jesus at prayer more often than does St. Luke’s Gospel. He went to pray.

Right before this, Jesus explicitly tells his disciples for the first time that he will suffer greatly, be rejected by the leaders of religion, and be killed. Then he goes up the mountain to pray. Intimately linked to his heavenly Father, Jesus brings his destiny to prayer. In his discernment he goes to prayer, hoping for a sign that he is guided by God as he journeys into the grip of danger.

I welcome this Sunday the confirmation candidates from Idlewild Presbyterian Church—you together with our confirmation candidates. In fact, last Sunday worship we had the confirmation class from First United Methodist Church in Covington, Tennessee, together with their pastor, Reverend Tim Carpenter. After worship Reverend Carpenter and I talked at the baptistry, all the rest of the group having left to go to the church van. He mentioned his wife and two sons had been part of the delegation. Prior to worship each person in the delegation introduced themselves to me, but I didn’t know any of them were *his* family. I told him I wanted to meet them. All my robes on, I went with him and on the sidewalk, after he called them from the van, I met his wife Dawn and his two sons, Jordan and Ethan. I told them how happy I was to meet them because, back in 2002, right after the dedication of the renovated Cathedral, Reverend Carpenter had told me the story of the sign he received in prayer here at IC. His younger son Ethan asked his Dad what I was talking about. Right there on the sidewalk, with his wife and older son Jordan standing with us, Reverend Carpenter said what had happened (and he has given me permission to share it with you): “Ethan, in 1995 I was a student at Memphis Theological Seminary. In the middle of a weekday I made a visit to the Cathedral here in order to pray.

The church was empty. You see, Mom and I had applied for adoption, and we were waiting—unsure if we’d ever receive a child. In prayer I made a request, ‘God, if it’s all right, I’d like a sign, a sign that we’ll get a child—days from now, months, years; just a sign that we’d know.’ Right after that prayer the door in the east transept—right behind the organ, Ethan—that door opened, and a man pushing a baby carriage came in the cathedral. The man went before the altar and prayed, as the baby lay in the buggy. Then, after his prayer, he wheeled the baby carriage out the same door he entered. Ethan, the Lord put it on my heart that it would work out: it was the sign I longed for. And then, I was at peace.” Reverend Carpenter paused, and then added: “Exactly nine months after that, Mom and I got the call: we had Jordan to adopt.”

Yes, Jesus went to prayer, longing for a confirmation about his next steps. On the mountain, he too had an “aha” moment, an experience that shone on his face. In prayer, Jesus experienced being enveloped by the Father’s presence, and he had the peace to make *his* way to the cross. Oh, you remember the story about Moses, when he was on Mount Sinai, and after he had one of those “aha” experiences of God, his face too became radiant (Exodus 34:29). (1)

Sisters and brothers: It happened to Jesus in prayer, and that encounter with God is reflected on his face. Then, he starts on his “exodus”—that is, his “exit,” his way to the cross. Those are transfiguration moments. It happened too with Reverend Carpenter here when, in his words, “God put it on his heart” that it would all work out. Haven’t you had those moments—moments of God that anchor you as you make your way of the cross, touchstones that sustain you on the pilgrimage? In prayer have you asked God for such a moment, a sign, such that peace might radiate from your face?

**“Then from the cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is my chosen son; listen to him.’”** May the brightness of his light shine forth from us!

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(1) See Barbara E. Reid, “The Face of Freedom,” *America* (February 22, 2010), pg. 39.