

2nd Sunday of Lent (C)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
February 20, 21, 2016

The week went very fast. And then it was time again to prepare something for breaking open the Word for this Second Sunday of Lent. Just as we always hear about Temptations of Jesus on the First Sunday of Lent, so we always hear the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus on the Second Sunday of Lent. God does not leave us in the desert of this world to deal with our temptations alone. God gives us particular experiences of Himself to help us deal with the temptations that we have.

Toward the end of the week I picked up a yellow note pad from a table in the house, and looking briefly at it I noticed notes about the Transfiguration that I had written while on a Jesuit retreat in Oshkosh, WI 15 years ago. Call it a sign, if you will. I certainly did. I had written the following:

“Jesus reveals that not only is this (transfiguration) (manifesting God/divinity) for Him, but for me as well. This is for all of us who are created in God's image. There can be times when I allow God to shine forth from me --- a clear sign I am God's son.

I must come to know Jesus and truly love Jesus.

I can manifest God in caring for and being open to people. I must consciously think and then ask myself ... Can they see Jesus in me? (Does Jesus shine through me?)

In today's First Scripture and Gospel reading, we hear examples of God manifesting himself to two people on whom He, God, was going to depend: Abraham and Jesus Himself. Moment of such clear awareness of God's presence and strength are available to all of us. As I mentioned, we are not left here without support to deal with our temptations. Personally I have not had any experiences of altered states of consciousness; no trances or visions are part of my religious experiences. But there have been some very special moments of closeness to God, and these have been strengthening to me at various times in my life.

One of these happened on July 7, 1982. I know this because I wrote a reflection about it when the day ended. But the ground work for the experience was actually laid a year or two earlier, 1980 or 1981.

Community Service day at Regis – 1980 or 1981

Frances Jircha – S.W. Side – humble dwelling, Czech neighborhood. She mentioned her brother, who lived in back room – didn't come out much - never went to church (common Czech phenomenon.) This concerned Frances; she prayed a lot about that.

On July 7, 1982, I was called to Mercy Hospital, (c. 10 a.m.) because they could not find the chaplain or another priest. Resentful ... my summer day interrupted. As teacher, I was used to free summer days.

I waited in trauma center – no ambulance available. Shortly before noon an ambulance came with the person I had been called for. The person was elderly male; name William Jircha (brother of Frances whom I had met a year or more ago. He could not speak for the oxygen mask and general physical weakness.

Book in hand, prayers ready ... but I did nothing. I literally did not know what to do ... (As a teacher, I was not used to these kinds of situations.) And in this case, with William absent from Church for so many years, I did not know what to do ... and I could not find out what he wanted done, if anything. (he came into the hospital alone, without family)

But I knew I was there for something ... by marvelous divine chance.

I followed him to his room after a while ... I asked the Lord to be with him. I prayed that the Lord would be for him what was needed at that moment. And I prayed that I would do what the Church would want.

Intending to anoint William conditionally, my words were actually those of full anointing.

The rest of the afternoon was my own ... but I went to the hospital that evening I think to visit a student from school who was sick. When leaving I took time to stop to see William., Oxygen off ... lying peacefully alone in the room. I thought he was sleeping. I asked a nurse ... she said he was dead.

Then the day became very special ... I returned to William's room, prayed for him, touched his cold forehead, and in doing this knew I touch Jesus, as He (Jesus) had been touching me through the entire day.

These are the final lines of what I wrote that evening ...

Lord, thank-you for the marvelous divine chance of this day. The chance to serve, the change to be touched by you, the chance to grow deeper in trust and love of you.

Tonight, Lord, William Jircha died. He lives now with you; and you live in me more clearly and deeply. Thank-you William, for this marvelous divine chance to be with you, and with our Jesus Lord.

Early in the day even begrudgingly ... I was concerned about bringing William to God. As the day ended, I realize that William (God) had brought me to Him.

As St. Paul says to us in today's Second Scripture, "Continue to stand firm in the Lord ... Do not be enemies of the cross of Christ." But try to be especially alert to the surprise appearances of Jesus. They can strengthen us against the temptations on the journey. They are given to us on our way to the cross, just as will the Body and Blood of Jesus in this Mass.