

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent - Luke 9:28b-36**

A young priest was paying his first pastoral visit to a nursing home in a new parish. He was running late. He had skipped lunch and was hungry. As he entered the room of an elderly bedridden woman and introduced himself, he couldn't help but notice a large bowl of peanuts sitting on her nightstand. Although it was not his normal practice, he excused himself and said, "Ma'am, do you mind if I have some of those peanuts?" "Of course, Father," she said with hospitality. "Help yourself." So he took some, and although the peanuts had a strange texture and a faintly stale taste, it was good to have something in his stomach. So he kept eating handful after handful as the old lady rambled on about her connection to the parish and the achievements of all of her children and grandchildren. By the time he caught himself, he realized that he had eaten almost all the peanuts in the bowl. Somewhat embarrassed, he took the bowl and extended it to the woman saying, "Excuse my rudeness. Would you like some of these peanuts?" "Oh, no, Father," she said with a smile. "I don't like peanuts. I just like the chocolate coating. After I have sucked that off, I put the peanuts in that bowl."

Things are often different than they seem. It is amazing how often we walk around with a false picture of who we are, who other people are, and what is the true condition of our surroundings.

We can know someone for many years and suddenly find out that there is a part of that person—a gift, a flaw, a dream—to which we were blind.

Someone that we always trusted can turn out to be false. Someone we never understood can suddenly step forward as a friend. And when this new truth hits us, it can confuse us and disorientate us.

This is what happens to the disciples in today's gospel. In the Transfiguration they see a new truth about Jesus. They had

always seen Jesus as a teacher and a friend, but in this experience they see him as a being in glory, as a companion to Moses and Elijah.

That new truth overwhelms them. Peter doesn't know what he is talking about. They are all terrified. Yet, when the vision passes, the disciples realize that they have grown. For now they see more clearly who Jesus really is.

Even though truth can be confusing and disturbing, we always take a step forward when we can claim it. Even though truth can be painful, it is better to own it than to continue on in illusion and denial.

Lent is a time where we try to take a step closer to the truth. And in a particular way where we try to own the truth about ourselves, because self-knowledge is always incomplete.

The height of Greek wisdom was inscribed on the temple of Apollo in Delphi, and it read, "Know yourself." The Greeks understood that following that command was the task of a lifetime.

So how do we come towards greater self-knowledge? How do we move towards knowing ourselves?

Let me suggest two steps: Know who you are **not**, and know where you are going. No one is good at everything. None of us have all the gifts. Yet it is amazing how we continue to frustrate ourselves by trying to be people who we are not.

We have always dreamed of being on American Idol, and so we sing at parties even though we have no voice. We are determined to help other people. So we give advice even though we don't know what we're saying.

We want others to see us as successful, so we talk about our talents and our accomplishments, but instead of impressing people we make ourselves look foolish.

All of us have gifts. But the first step to discovering the gifts we have is admitting the gifts that we do not have. It is freeing to be able to admit, “I’m not good at organization. I’m not good at listening. I’m not good at communication.” When we can admit who we are **not**, we take a step towards knowing ourselves.

We also need to know where we are going. This truth is fundamentally a matter of faith. Because we believe that we are daughters and sons of God, that our final end is union with God, that we are bound to eternal life.

When we know where we’re going, when we know what our final destination is, it gives us strength to face the troubles of life.

Knowing yourself is the work of a lifetime. But knowing who you are **not** and knowing where you are going are two steps towards greater self-knowledge.

The season of Lent encourages us to take those steps. The transfiguration of Jesus reminds us that moving towards the truth will lead us to growth.

Even though it is difficult to face the weight of truth, it is better than living in illusion. For claiming the truth of who we are gives us power.

Or as Jesus says in John’s gospel, “The truth will set you free.”