

Text: Matthew 17:1-9  
Second Sunday of Lent, Cycle A  
12 March 2017  
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Whenever I hear this story, I recall the quiet afternoon my neighbor carried his gun down to our beach, and took his own life. It happened just before the Second Sunday of Lent, when this story always is read. Ever after, the two memories permanently are joined for me: Jesus heading up the mountain to reveal, for a moment, what he will be like in heaven, before he heads down to begin his suffering, and my neighbor heading down to the beach to end his suffering.

What does this story mean, in itself, and why do we always hear this story on the Second Sunday of Lent, for the past 500 years?

Six days before this story, Jesus tells his friends how he is going to suffer, and be killed, and then be raised to life, and Jesus tells his friends that, by following him and his way, they too – we too – will be given a cross, and die to ourselves, and live again. Seven days later, after a week of preparation – like the week of preparation Moses spent before going up Mount Sinai to meet God – Jesus goes up Mount Tabor to show the truth of his promise: there *is* glory beyond the Cross, and life beyond our sufferings. When Jesus reveals, in that brief moment, how he will appear in heaven after the Cross and Resurrection, how he will appear when he comes again at the end to bring us back to heaven with him, crowned with stars in place of thorns – it is a shining promise of hope to those who follow Jesus, to keep their hearts uplifted and their courage strengthened for the struggles ahead. Which is why Jesus tells his friends, after the vision, before they head down the mountain: “Rise, and do not be afraid.”

The Church reads this story at Mass on the Second Sunday of Lent – as it has done for the past 500 years – for the same reason: to give us hope for our journey through Lent, the promise beyond the Cross. And much more: to give us hope for our *Life* journey, because Lent – when each of us renews our commitment to the Christian life – is a metaphor for all of life. We hear the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus – that shining moment on the mountaintop – every year on this day to remind ourselves that there *is* meaning beyond our struggle, life beyond our suffering, both in this world and in the world that waits for us, promised by God and pledged in Jesus his Son on that

mountain.

My neighbor - my friend - went down to the beach that afternoon to take his life because he had lost hope; he despaired, overcome by suffering. I understand. Who among us here won't have a day when we might feel likewise overcome? But God, the Father of Jesus Christ, does not want us to live without hope, so he gives us the promise of life in his Son, and the Church does not want us to live without hope, so it gives us yearly this story - which, of course, we can go to the Bible and read anytime we need, like using our cell phones as Pope Francis reminded us this week. May we, through the promise of Jesus, be able to lift up our hearts, and rise in life, and not be afraid.