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Sacred Heart Parish, Effingham, Illinois
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The Second Sunday of Lent (B)

Today, dear brothers and sisters, we are told that Peter "hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified" (Mark 9:6). What is it that the Apostles feared? They feared the very thing that also filled them with a great enthusiasm and a desire to make three tents (cf. Mark 9:5). Their fear left them all but speechless, even as it filled them with a desire to remain there in the presence of the glorified Lord.

If we examine the Scriptures, we will see that "light is a sign that reveals something of God: it is, as it were, a reflection of his glory which accompanies its manifestations. When God appears, 'His brightness was like the light, rays flashed from his hand' (Habakkuk 3:4)."¹

Mark tells us that Jesus' garments "became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them" (Mark 9:3) and Matthew tells us that they "became white as light" (Matthew 17:2). If we consider the words the Psalmist sings to the Lord, "You are clothed with honor and majesty, [you] who cover yourself with light as with a garment," the symbolism is clear: Jesus is God. The words Peter addressed to Jesus only a few days earlier are true: "You are the Christ, the Son of the

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus Address, 6 August 2006.

living God" (Matthew 16:16). For this reason we acknowledge him in the Creed as "the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father.

There is something about light that both draws us and gives us pause. If we find ourselves in a dark tunnel we are drawn toward the light at the end, and yet when we emerge into the full light of day we draw back slightly because the light hurts our eyes. So it is with Christ, the true "light of the world" (John 9:5). The glory of the light that radiated from Christ engendered in Peter a holy fear, as it should with us.

When Peter beheld the glory, the light, of the Lord, he must surely have recalled those initial words he addressed to Jesus as he fell to his knees by the lake of Gennesaret: "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). Is it not the same with us? The radiant beauty of the Lord's light draws us toward him, yet we draw back in fear of our sinfulness, though he says to us always, as he said to Peter, "Do not be afraid" (Luke 5:10); "Come to me" (Matthew 11:28).

There is nothing to fear in Jesus Christ, in him whom the Father did not spare, but handed over for us all (cf. Romans 8:28). He has come to loose our bonds through his death and resurrection, to break the shackles of sin of death (cf. Psalm

116:16). If we "call upon the name of the Lord" confessing our sins, he will give us his mercy and forgiveness (Psalm 116:17).

When Jesus first called Peter, the fisherman abandoned everything and followed him because, with the Psalmist, Peter said, "My heart has prompted me to seek your face; I seek it, Lord; do not hide from me" (Psalm 26:8-9). When he saw his face and heard his voice, Peter said, "O Lord, I am your servant" (Psalm 116:16). These words we, too, must say; in fact, we have already said them.

In the waters of Baptism, we were united with Jesus' passion, "the purification that restores to us the original garment lost through our sin (cf. Luke 15:22)."² Indeed, through Baptism "we are clothed with Jesus in light and we ourselves become light."³

But we also know that our light does not always shine as brightly as it should and that our garments are not as white as they once were; we know that we are sinners. It is precisely for this reason that we must seek the face of God and heed the command of the Father: "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him" (Mark 9:7). But where are to seek him and hear his voice?

We will always find him the Sacrament of Penance, of Confession, of Reconciliation. Many today are afraid of this

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 311.

great gift the Lord has given to his Church. Many fear naming their sins and others find it difficult to believe that Jesus could forgive them. My friends, let us hear again the words of Saint Paul: "He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything along with him" (Romans 8:28)? God's mercy is like the waters of a floodgate waiting to be opened and poured out. All it takes to release these waters is our confession, made honestly, sincerely and in integrity of heart.

Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, "It is not sin which is at the heart of the sacramental celebration but rather God's mercy, which is infinitely greater than any guilt of ours."⁴

Is your heart filled with peace? If you are at peace, then come and receive the Lord's mercy that you may remain at peace. If you are not at peace, then come to the Sacrament of God's mercy and to be given peace, that your garment may be restored to its original brightness. Yes, my brothers and sisters, seek the face of the Lord in the Sacrament of Reconciliation! "We can be healed. Souls that are wounded and ill, as everyone knows by experience, not only need advice but true renewal, which can only come from God's power, from the power of Crucified Love," the power revealed in the Transfiguration.⁵

⁴ *Ibid.*, Address to the Course on the Internal Forum, 7 March 2008.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Address to the Clergy of Rome, 7 February 2008.

Are we not drawn toward the Sacrament of Penance - does not something about it seem right and necessary - even as we are afraid of it? Do not let your fear keep you from receiving his mercy!

When Peter, James and John saw the glory of the Lord on Mount Tabor they did not run away but desired to stay and build three tents. As they saw Jesus transfigured before them they saw not only his glory, but also his mercy and love. If we meet him in the confessional, we, too, will see his mercy and love and will say with Peter, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here" (Mark 9:5). Amen.