

Last Sunday of Epiphany, 2008 [A]: St. Frances, South Fork and St Stephen's, Monte Vista. February 3, 2008

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

Amen

Today is the *Last Sunday of Epiphany*. And this means that this Wednesday is *Ash Wednesday*, and the beginning of *Lent*. It is hard for me to realize that the season of *Epiphany* is over. We had only four weeks of *Epiphany* this year, since *Easter* comes so early. In fact, *Easter* can come earlier only on one other day, March 22. By the way, if you are interested, there are notes on how we find the date of *Easter* in your *Prayer Book* on pages 880 to 883. You can figure out the “Golden Number” or like me, simply use the charts provided.

At any rate, here we are on the Sunday that we call the *Last Sunday of Epiphany*. It is now time to turn our thoughts toward preparing ourselves for the great feast of *Easter*, the celebration of the *Resurrection of our Lord and Savior*.

But before we begin with *Lent*, we must look at our lessons for today. Don't they sound familiar? Don't they seem almost out of place?

Why are we reading lessons today that we read on August 6, on the *Feast of the Transfiguration*? Is this just a coincidence that we are asked to consider the theme of the *Transfiguration* on the *Last Sunday of Epiphany* and the *First Sunday before Lent*? Of course not, I think that we can easily recognize that our lessons for today and the themes that they hold are very carefully selected -- to create a wonderful transition for us as we move from the season of *Epiphany* to the season of *Lent*.

The first thing that we must note is that no matter how many Sundays there are in *Epiphany-tide*, we are instructed by the Lectionary to use on this day the set of lessons which deal with the *Transfiguration*. It is also important to note that in all three of the Lectionary Schedules, A, B, and C, that we have the same stories but from different books of the *Bible*. For example in Lectionary A, our Gospel lesson for today, we have the story of the *Transfiguration* from St. Matthew; in B, we have St. Mark's version, and in C, we have the version of the *Transfiguration* according to St. Luke.

Likewise, the Old Testament lessons are all variations on Moses receiving the Law and how his physical appearance was changed after his

direct encounter with God. So with the appointment of these lessons, we can easily assume that there must be some important reason for us to remember the *Transfiguration* on this Sunday, the *Last Sunday of Epiphany* and the first Sunday before we begin our *Lent*.

You will remember that we have identified that one theme of *Epiphany* is that this is our season of evangelism. We have recognized that in this season, more than any other season of the Church's year that we must focus on others by proclaiming our Christ to the World. It is our time to “*epiphanos*” our Lord; our time "to show him forth" and “to hold him up”; "to display and exhibit" Him to the world. This is the theme of this season and this is our *Epiphany* task. And basic to that task is the announcement and proclamation that Jesus is the Blessed Son of God and that we must listen to Him.

On the *First Sunday of Epiphany*, we read about the *Baptism of Jesus* in the Gospel lesson and in that lesson we heard the voice from Heaven declaring "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." and of course, this is the ultimate expression of *Epiphany* – of the manifestation of Jesus as the Son of God. With today's Gospel lesson,

again we hear the voice from on high: "This is my Son, the Beloved; with Him I am well pleased, listen to him!"

There can be no clearer message of *Epiphany* – of the manifestation of Jesus Christ than this. These two Gospel lessons – one from the *First Sunday of Epiphany* and one from the *Last Sunday of Epiphany* - serve as "book ends" to remind us just who Jesus is and that it is our task to serve as witnesses to His presence, to His love, and to His saving grace.

The message of the *Transfiguration* in its simplest form is to help us know, recognize, and accept who Jesus is. He is the Son of God, a Son with whom God is well pleased. This is the Gospel of our Lord – the Good News which we must proclaim.

As we consider the themes of *Transfiguration* on this *Last Sunday of Epiphany*, the season which we have called the season of evangelism, we are dramatically reminded of who Jesus is and what the basic theme of our ministry and our evangelism must be: "Jesus is the Son of God. He is our Salvation and He is our means of resurrection and life."

Perhaps now, we can see the importance of the themes of the *Transfiguration* as we move into Lent. In all three accounts of the

Transfiguration, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we find that Jesus specifically tells his disciples of the events of his *Passion, Death, and Resurrection*. In His *Transfiguration*, the authors of the Gospels knew that a key element in Jesus' manifestation as the Son of God was His *Death and Resurrection*. This, of course, points us directly toward *Easter*, the day in which we celebrate our Lord and Savior's triumph over death in his *Resurrection* -- and we find that our salvation is assured.

Now as we move toward *Easter*, we face the rigors of *Lent*, the season in which we prepare ourselves for the celebration of Our Lord's *Resurrection*.

To guide us in that celebration, I believe that it is important for us to hear again the *Ash Wednesday Charge* found on **page 264** in the *Book of Common Prayer*. **[Read]**

This *Charge* reminds us of the historical significance of the Season of *Lent* and that *Lent* is a season of penitence and fasting. In this *Charge*, we are reminded that we must observe a *Holy Lent* by:

1. Self examination and repentance,
2. Prayer, fasting and self denial,

3. And reading of and meditation on God's Holy Word.

Thus we find the classical elements of a *Lenten Rule of Life*. During this season, we should especially make sure that we pray, study, meditate, sacrifice, and examine our lives and thus come to repentance and renewal.

Too often, however, I find that for many *Lent* takes on an excessive note of gloom and difficulty. Certainly this is a season of solemnity and simplicity. It is difficult for us to honestly face our lives and ourselves and to acknowledge how we have fallen short of God's will, but *Lent* can be much more. It can be a season of happy and beautiful growth. I would like to share an analogy of *Lent* with you.

We need to remember where the word, *Lent*, comes from. It comes from an Old English word, Middle English actually, "*lente*" which means spring! But Spring is a time for beginnings, for new growth, a time for the most glorious array of flowers and blossoms. Spring flowers in their wonderful beauty put the flowers of the rest of the seasons to shame. So I believe that it is to Spring that we should look for the model of our *Lent*.

In Spring, we begin to clear the dead leaves and brush out of our gardens. So to, in *Lent*, we must clean up our lives and our hearts. In

Spring, we prepare the soil by tilling and perhaps adding a bit of fertilizer or mulch. So too, in *Lent*, we prepare our lives by prayer, study, and self-denial. Next in Spring, we add a few new plants and seeds to last year's bulbs and plants that are beginning to peak through the soil. And in our lives, we add works, so that our faith may begin to grow and shine forth.

Certainly, we acknowledge the seriousness of the season of *Lent*, but we must remember that *Lent* is also the "Spring of our faith." *Lent* provides us the opportunity to grow in Faith as we follow our Lenten rules of sacrifice, prayer, meditation and penitence.

So as we begin this season of *Lent*, we must remember the themes of the *Transfiguration* and of this *Last Sunday of Epiphany*. We must remember our ministry of showing and sharing Our Lord with others. We must remember the discipline that *Lent* calls us to, and we must remember that this season can be the Spring of our souls and our lives.

May God guide us as we begin our Lenten pilgrimages and bless us with new growth and new life in our faith.

Amen

