

All-Star Sunday

Soon, very soon, we will begin our long march through the desert of Lent. We will mark that beginning by ashing our foreheads on Wednesday, by confessing all the ways in which we aren't perfect, all the ways in which we stumble and fall. We will gather around the altar and acknowledge our imperfections, our limitations, and all the various things that make us human, all too human.

40 days wandering in a spiritual wilderness. That's what we're facing. That's the road ahead, a road of uncertainty, a road of repentance, a road of real and honest transformation. That's what is waiting for us on Thursday, after the ash dust of Wednesday settles down, and we stare into the future. A journey inward, a journey in which we come face to face with our mortality, and our own sinfulness, and our own brokenness.

But not yet. We're not there yet. We haven't taken that first step into the wilderness, and so we haven't come this morning to focus on all the ways in which we fail, falter and fall to the floor.

This morning, we've come not only for solace, but for strength. Not only pardon, but renewal. This morning, we're here bearing witness to the Transfigured Jesus, shining in the fullness of his glory, shining as a beacon for all the world to see. Shining as a beacon for us to see. Shining so that, if only for this moment right now, we catch a glimpse of what we ourselves can become: shining, transfigured, changed people whose lives radiate the grace of the Gospel.

We catch a glimpse of this reality today, the last Sunday of the Epiphany, so that the desert journey of Lent doesn't feel so hopeless, so aimless. Here we stand, before the altar of God, bearing witness again to this moment of glory, beauty, and tenderness. Here we stand, a

people on the edge of our future, being overcome by the beauty of Jesus of Nazareth, a beauty that we too can share in, for the very same flesh and blood illuminated on that mountain is the very same flesh and blood you bear today. Can you not see your own beauty in the beautiful face of Jesus Christ? Can you not see in him your own destiny, a destiny of transfiguration, of transformation, of salvation, sanctification, and all else that comes with the grace of God in Christ Jesus?

*For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* The Transfiguration isn't placed before us to remind us only of who Jesus is. It's given to us just before Ash Wednesday to remind us of who we are, who we were created to be, and who we are called to become. It's here to fuel our Lenten journey, to act as a mirror when we stumble and falter, when we are trying our hardest to join our Savior in the sunlight but all we see around us is an oppressive cloud of gloom. When that moment comes, when you find yourself face down in the dirt, when you're weighed down by an awareness of your own mortality, that's when you summon the courage to claim with boldness that your worst mistakes and failures won't define you. That's when you summon the light from within, the light already indwelling by the Holy Spirit, to drive away the clouds of gloom and remember that your aim and destiny is not discarded or diminished by your humanness.

Soon, very soon, we will stand before this altar and be reminded that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. But right now, right now we stand before this altar and remember that we are more than dust. If the scientists are to be believed, then we are stardust, our bodies being made of elements found first inside the stars that exploded so long ago when creation was born. We are more than the dust of failure and death. We are stardust, something beautiful, holy, and

unique. We remember that we are more than our failures, our mistakes, our flaws and everything else we focus on that holds us back from taking hold of our destiny. You are more than dust, my friends. You're stardust. You're a living, breathing vessel of the greatest power this world has ever known, the redemptive power of love made real in Jesus of Nazareth.

You don't need to wait until Ash Wednesday to make a right beginning to Lent. Give yourself over now to the power of this story, the story of the Transfigured Jesus, and walk into Lent with the conviction that you will come out the other side shining brighter than ever before. You're stardust. You're stronger than you think you are. Trust me!