

2nd Sunday of Lent (C)

16th March 2025

'Nicene Creed IX: Eternal Life & the Saints' (CCC 946–1065)

Gen 15: The Covenant with Abraham: descendants, land, rite.

Ps 26: *It is Your face O Lord that I seek*

Phil 3: *copies of His own glorious body* Lk 4: 1–13: the Transfiguration

Just as we are taken each year by Jesus to the Judaeen wilderness on the 1st Sunday of Lent, so too each year for the 2nd Sunday of Lent we are taken by Him high above the Jezreel Valley to the top of Mt Tabor in Galilee, the mountain of the Transfiguration. On the first Sunday, Jesus mapped out for us the 40 days' Lenten fast that He asks us to join Him in; and this week Jesus encourages us atop the mountain with this glimpse of His radiance. We need the Lord to light up our Lent — *it is a journey in the light*, not in the dark! The Transfiguration is a sign of the much greater light to come at the end of Lent, at Easter. Here, near the start of Lent, we see the light of a mini-Resurrection ... it keeps us going, it shines and lifts our hearts, as we head through Lent towards the great light to shine out when Jesus will triumph over death and hell. So, let's walk this Lenten discipline in the light of Jesus: in the light of the truth of who He is, and towards His glorious life-giving light of Easter.

This hint of the Resurrection brings us appropriately to the theme of today's homily which is the last of this

series on the Nicene Creed, on the final sentence of our profession of faith: "*I look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.*" This is the goal and destiny of our life as Christians, life with Christ for ever. A belief in the Resurrection, or in any form of afterlife, was a matter of debate for the Jews. Some believed in it, others did not; and the Scriptures of the OT make only fleeting reference to any strong belief. In the period closer to Jesus's time, however, some Jews' belief in the Resurrection was quite developed. Certainly the Maccabees, who were willing to be martyred rather than perform sacrilege and deny their faith, drew on a very strong belief that in the life to come they would be rewarded by God. *Jesus Himself, of course, taught repeatedly the facts of heaven and hell*, the consequences of our choices for or against God in this life. And not just that, He associated that life to come with *Himself*. To His friend St Martha, as He was about to exhibit His power over life and death in raising her brother Lazarus, He made that complete identification: *I am the Resurrection and the*

Life, whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Jesus's own Resurrection on Easter Sunday, not as a ghost or mere spirit, but *a full resurrection of the body*, is the fullest expression of all that hope. As the Son of God He can and does offer life beyond the grave, and no-one else in all human history can even pretend to do that. When the apostles were choosing someone to replace Judas Iscariot, they insisted that it had to be *a witness of the resurrection of the Lord*: this was the key to their preaching, that they had seen the Lord risen. It was for this that St Paul was laughed at in Athens, and ill-treated so many times ... for the proclamation that Jesus had risen from the dead, offering us also life eternal.

When we die our bodies and souls suffer a separation. Except for Our Blessed Lady, whose perfect sinlessness meant that she wasn't subject to physical disintegration, our bodies shall lie in the grave. As bodiless spirits we shall be judged according to our lives: those who have already reached perfection ('living saints') shall go straight to heaven; those who need purification shall go for

a time to purgatory to prepare for heaven; those whose sins are grave and whose lives have deliberately been opposed to God's grace shall go to hell. The Church teaches that certain people are undoubtedly in heaven; but teaches that no specific person is in hell: only God knows someone's heart and their inner desire for Him and for forgiveness. But hell remains a reality: Jesus Himself taught of hell; and it is a demand of free will: if someone chooses definitively to refuse God's mercy, then what can God do?

Then, at the end of time, when God brings all things to completion, there will be *the Last Judgment and the Resurrection of the Body*. Our ultimate destiny — what we are called to be — is not to be a bodiless spirit, but reunited with a glorified body. This will be a body like Our Lord's in His Resurrection, or like Our Lady's in the ways that she appears in her apparitions. It is not a body that will age or die again, but something eternal, in which we can be fully ourselves again, and enjoy the happiness of God's presence. God made us for this, *fully human in His glory*, where the Lord Jesus in His Resurrection has led the

way. A famous Catholic work, *The Imitation of Christ*, has a beautiful passage on death, quoted in the *Catechism*:

“Every action of yours, every thought, should be those of one who expects to die before the day is out. Death would have no great terrors for you if you had a quiet conscience ... Then why not keep clear of sin instead of running away from death? If you aren't fit to face death today, it's very unlikely you will be tomorrow.”

Now, when we think of the Resurrection, we also must think of the Church *as a whole*; resurrection is not just some individual event. The visible Church is only a small proportion of the whole Church. Like the tip of an iceberg, we the Church living on earth today are just that 10% of the whole. The family of the Church is much larger, and includes those being purified after death in purgatory, and those who already are experiencing the eternal rest of heaven. Traditionally we use the terms, the Church *militant*, the Church *suffering*, and the Church *triumphant*. That is: **militant** (the Church struggling on earth, in its earthly battles with the evil one); **suffering** (the members of the Church undergoing the purifying pains of purgatory to be made ready for heaven); and **triumphant**

(the Church in glory, in perfection with God in heaven, the saints). *Together we form the whole Church, the communion of saints*; we share together in all that Christ has brought. Our older brothers and sisters in faith, the ones who have gone before us: some are in heaven, where they pray for us; some are in purgatory, where we pray for them. The union is bonded together in love and charity and prayer, just as the Church from the beginning was a communion, a sharing of all things: the apostles and other disciples lived a common life, sharing property and food, sharing their prayers, and the greatest act of communion was the Eucharist, *Holy Communion*. The great gift of the Church is that together, the living and the dead — those on earth, those in heaven, those in purgatory — are constantly joined in love and concern one for another. This communion is made possible by the unifying gift of the Spirit, and in a special way by the power of the Mass.

Our Catholic faith includes a strong element of devotion to the saints, doesn't it? It is important to understand this. Saints are just ordinary people, so why do

we pray to them? Well, if you think about it, we often ask one another to pray for us, don't we? And we're more likely to ask someone to pray for us that we think is a holy and prayerful person, aren't we, someone close to God? Our asking for the saints' prayers is the logical extension of that: asking those who are closest to God, those in His very presence in heaven, to take up our needs in prayer to God. Our Lady takes first place in this, as the Mother of the Saviour, assumed body & soul in her perfection, into heaven; naturally she is the closest of all human beings to her Son, Our Lord Jesus. Events such as the Wedding Feast at Cana show her intercession with Jesus, bringing by her maternal hand the ordinary needs of humanity to Him. This is why we ask her prayers, and those of other saints. Technically we are not praying "to" them; we are praying to ask *their* prayers. So, in the Hail Mary, the main request is, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, *pray for us ...*" To appeal to the saints is to express our family bond, the larger dimension of the Church, bringing onside the 90% that is at present invisible to us. We shouldn't leave this memory

just to the November celebrations of All Saints' Day (commemorating all in heaven) and All Souls' Day (commemorating the faithful departed in purgatory). We should see the invisible 90% of the Church as supporting us with spiritual courage and strength. Rather like the iceberg, we only hold together as the visible Church because of the 90% which stands under us and holds us up! Without them, we would not be here; if they had not kept the faith, there would be no Church. Their communion with us is all-important, and just as we think so often of our natural family as being the very anchor of life, so by extension the family of the Church, the communion of saints, holds us together in a far greater sense. The saints in heaven remind us that the very purpose of the Church is that we are *sinners trying to become saints*. Their example, their prayers, their lives, are our inspiration to achieve what they achieved, by faithfulness to God.

*SS Peter, James & John, who witnessed first the divine glory of Jesus on the holy mountain, pray for us!
All Holy Men & Women of Jesus's Church, pray for us!*