

A GLIMPSE OF ETERNITY TO STRENGTHEN US

There are 2 Major Questions every modern man/woman is seeking answers to: **The Existence of God and The Existence of the Afterlife.** These questions are contained in our readings on this 2nd Sunday of Lent which is always centred on the Transfiguration of Christ. I would like to offer us 2 separate but interconnected stories touching on the above 2 questions.

One of the greatest mystics our world and the Catholic Church has ever produced is St Teresa of Avila who lived from 1515 – 1582. God graced her with the gifts of visions and distinct commands from God, reading and directing souls, raptures, levitation, and the gift of Mystical Union with God which is referred to as **TRANSVERBERATION.**

Around 1559, while Teresa of Avila was praying in her cell, she visibly saw an angel who pierced her heart with a flaming arrow, and she narrated the experience in her book – The Book of Her Life. The angel that came to her in a bodily form was a Cherub and stood at her left side. The angel was most beautiful with his face burning with fire. In his hand, he had a long spear of gold and at its peak was a little fire. The angel used that to pierce her heart few times and each time he drew it out, he seemed to draw Teresa's heart at the same time, leaving her on fire with a great love and desire for God. The pains were so great that they made her moan and yet, the sweetness was excessive that she did not want them to stop. Although the pain was spiritual, Teresa of Avila noted that her body had a large share of it. According to her, during the days that this Mystical Ecstasy lasted, she did not wish to speak to anyone but to cherish her pains and to commune with God. When Teresa of Avila talked about her mystical experience with other people, a lot did not believe her, in fact, many thought she was mad. However, after her death in 1582, her body was buried and after many years, it was exhumed and found to be incorrupt. At one point, her heart was removed from her body and examined, and everyone was astonished to discover that her physical heart had several wounds caused by the angel's spear when she had her Mystical Union of Transverberation. Benedict Zimmerman while writing another autobiography of St Teresa of Avila in 1997, re-examined her heart and stated: **“The chief wound in her heart is distinctly visible, is horizontal, about an inch and a half in length; it looks as if it had been inflicted with a knife, but formerly distinct traces of burning could be seen. There are several minor wounds in different parts.”** St Teresa of Avila's Transverberation like the Transfiguration of Christ which we are presented with in today's Gospel pericope from Mark Chapter 9, is a Theophany to strengthen us in our hours of darkness and uncertainty, just as Christ used it to strengthen the faith of Peter, James, and John, before undergoing His brutal passion for our salvation. In the Transfiguration, we encounter the fact that Jesus' clothes were dazzlingly white, the same way the Cherub that appeared to St Teresa of Avila was covered with burning fire; this tells us that God's splendour is indescribable and the only thing we can likened it to, is our experience with light. One thing is sure, with God and in God, there is no darkness of any sort.

This leads me seamlessly into the 2nd Question that arises from the Transfiguration – **The Existence of the Afterlife**. We read that Moses and Elijah who died many centuries before Christ, appeared to, and talked with Him. The question of whether there is an Afterlife or not is one that many people do ponder all the time. In 2019, Chris Magruder and Julie Nelson, were hosting the American radio show – **Catholic Women Now**; their topic for the radio show was: “**How Heaven and Earth come together during the Mass**”, and they made extensive research on the topic. After presenting the first segment of the show, Chris Magruder who had not been to Mass in a long time decided to give it a go. During the transubstantiation, Chris felt the Lord calling her to “**show the world what they would see during every Mass, if the veil was removed.**” Chris came back from Mass, shared the inspiration with the entire team and everyone was on board. In December 2019 the team released a short film with the title – **THE VEIL REMOVED**. The Veil Removed is a short film of 5 minutes that reveals the coming together of heaven and earth at Mass, as seen by saints and mystics, revealed by scripture and in the catechism of the Catholic Church. Since its release 4 years ago, the film has been viewed on YouTube by millions people all over the world. Each time I watch this film, I get goosebumps; as a priest, it reminds me of that eternal truth I was taught as a young boy at catechism classes and what I celebrate each day – **That during Mass, heaven and earth are bounded in one seamless and harmonious unity**. After watching the movie, a viewer from the US posted this comment that goes to the heart of who we are and what we do as Catholics: “**The first time that I, a Protestant went into a Catholic Church and attended the Holy Mass, I felt that I was in heaven or at least at the gates of heaven. I am now forever thankful to be a full member of the Catholic Church. Thank You Jesus!!!**” At our daily Eucharistic celebrations, God lets down the veil covering His glory and lets us in; it is that glory that we are presented with in all the readings on this Second Sunday of Lent. Yes, the Afterlife is a reality, we experience it, are surrounded by it and we touch it palpably at every Mass. Do we know that at the Holy, Holy, Holy, God opens the heavens and allows the Angels, and Saints to descend among us and worship Him with us? Do we know that at this point of the Mass, all our loved ones who are dead and are at peace with God join us in paying homage to God? Do we know that at the Transubstantiation, we have the REAL PRESENCE Of CHRIST (BODY, BLOOD, SOUL & DIVINITY) AMONGST US? This is one of the many things that differentiates the Catholic Church from all the other Christian denominations and makes us special. Yes, we have the fullness of God here with us.

My friends, like St Teresa of Avila, let us ask God to open our eyes to catch a little glimpse of eternity as that will strengthen us especially during the dark times and uncertainties of our earthly sojourns. With God on our side, who can be against us?

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Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Lent, Year B (25/02/2024)