

## Sunday Homily

**Title** Transfiguration

**Date:** March 1, 2026

**Sunday:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent (A cycle)

**Scripture:** Matthew 17:1-9

**By:** Fr. Bob Schmitz

I borrow from Patrick J. Wilson. *Homiletic Perspective on Matthew 17:1-9*. In *Feasting on the Word: Preaching on the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A* volume 1. Westminster John Knox Press.

I include scripture citations to allow the reader to work through the biblical basis for my thoughts. Recall that I am exploring what scripture does to us, in us, and for us.

I use the NABRE.

**Text:** We old folks learned Christianity differently than the young do. Our teachers gave us a Baltimore Catechism, a book of questions and answers on the faith. We memorized the whole through our grade school years. We were not supposed to learn the faith that way. The bishops' instructions said the book was a teacher's manual, not a student's textbook. But the teachers were so effective that many old-timers still know the answers to the questions, like: "Why did God make you?" The answer is "To know, love, and serve Him in this world so we can be happy with Him in the next." "To know:" disciples must know God, who and what God is. If we get God wrong, we get life wrong. If we get God right—as much as finite types know the infinite—if we get God right, we get life right.

To know Christ and through Christ to know God is the reason for the Transfiguration. Of course, the radiance of the Lord captures our attention. Jesus transfigures, becoming light (17:2). Matthew emphasized that Jesus is light from the beginning of his life. The star that led nonbelievers, magi, to Jesus at his birth is the light of salvation (2:2), the first thing God created according to the Book of Genesis (Gen 1:3). It is the light proclaimed by Isaiah the prophet (Isa

9:1) and quoted by Matthew when Jesus began his ministry: “The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light” (4:16). The light is salvation. Three disciples perceive Jesus as saving light during the Transfiguration.

Recall, please, Jesus included his disciples in the light in the Sermon on the Mount. He preached: “You are the light of the world” (5:14). All the razzle-dazzle of the Transfiguration was about Jesus. But Matthew demonstrated that the event is a lesson on discipleship. Over and over, he referred to disciples; ten times, he used their names or a pronoun to remind us that the event was a teaching moment on discipleship. Matthew’s lesson reflects the psalmist’s insight: “For with you [God] is the fountain of life, and in your light, we see light” (Ps 36:10).

Now, it’s easy for us to get it wrong. Each Sunday we pull a text out of its context. Standing alone, this passage is about the glory, the magnificence, the power, and the majesty of the Lord. In context, all that changes. The event began six days earlier. Jesus came to realize He needed an intense, compelling event to continue teaching his disciples who He is (16:13ff). When Jesus started teaching about the Cross, that He must suffer to save humankind (16:21ff), Peter “rebuked” Jesus (16:22). Jesus scolded Peter: “Get behind me Satan” (16:23). The disciples needed a powerful, dramatic teaching moment.

You see, disciples, then and now, want glory and power. Even today, a growing number of disciples want Christians to seize political power to dominate others. Perhaps we all want to savor the glory, to share in the power.

God, the Father, delivered the key line of this lesson. “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (17:5). The word *beloved* comes from the Greek word for self-giving, self-sacrificing love. It is the word that the ancient church agreed described the very essence of

God as revealed by the crucified God—*agape*, self-sacrificing love. God the Father added these words: “with whom I am well pleased.” God plagiarized Himself; He had spoken that line through the prophet Isaiah to describe a Suffering Servant, a person who saves Israel by suffering for Israel (Isa 42:1). Then, God instructed disciples: “listen to him”—like the excellent teacher God must be.

Like an outstanding teacher, God repeated the lesson. When Matthew described the crucifixion, he referenced much of the imagery of the Transfiguration, sometimes as the opposite. Instead of light, there was darkness (27:45). Elijah the prophet was called but did not appear (27:47). Fear did overcome on-lookers (27:54). And three disciples were present, but not Peter, James, and John. Three women were present, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of James and John (27:56). All the men had fled (26:56); the women showed true discipleship throughout the Lord’s suffering. The most moving moment came when a Gentile, a Roman officer, repeated the Father’s insight about Jesus: “Truly, this was the Son of God” (27:57). Light continued to shine in the darkness; the one who suffered to save drew the disenfranchised and the stranger.

Here’s the lesson for all disciples. The God of glory and power, of magnificence and majesty is far surpassed by the God who shed it all in order that we might worship the God of love and gentleness (Wilson p. 457). We are to worship, yes, and more: we must organize our lives around the God of love and gentleness and the offspring of gentle love—charity, empathy, and compassion, along with inclusion and tolerance, organizing life around forgiveness, mercy, reconciliation, and peace. That’s what the old catechism meant when it taught us “to know, love, and serve God.” To quibble with the psalmist: In His light, we must become light.