

Reflecting
February 22, 2004
Exodus 34:29-35, 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2
Luke 9:28-36

Have you ever wanted something badly, really wanted it, and tried and tried to get it without success? And then, have you given up, relaxed, turned to something else, and then found to your surprise that what you first wanted came to you? Well, maybe you haven't had this experience. It may be pretty rare. More frequent is the experience of trying and trying to remember a word. Often it's only later, when we're thinking of something else, that the word comes to us. I think something like this happens in the life of us Christians.

Deep down we all want to shine, don't we? In our secret hearts we want to be noticed, maybe not necessarily admired, but at least thought well of. And we try to be good and to do the right thing. And when we do something well, we feel, probably rightly, that we deserve to get credit for it.

But look at Moses, coming down from that mountain. Moses is really, literally, lighting up the landscape. Everyone is noticing. In fact his face is so bright it frightens people. But Moses isn't announcing to the people, "Well, I spent forty days with the Lord, and he's forgiven you. I'm bringing you the commandments a second time, I'm bringing you a second chance." No, Moses isn't thinking of himself at all. And look how his face is shining! But he is unaware that his face was shining. He only knows it by people's reaction to him. He has to wear a veil over his face because the light is too bright for people.

Someone has said that the brightness of Moses' face came not from his desire to polish his reputation or from his efforts to look good in the eyes of the community. Moses' shine was a gift of God. It came because Moses had been privileged to see God's glory and had devoted himself to doing God's will and work. Moses was giving himself to the will of God and his shine was a byproduct of his commitment and focus. He was unaware of the brightness of his life as he lived it in God's light. In fact, in fact, his brightness was not his at all, but the reflected light of God.

Have you seen those stars, that you can buy in the store that will glow in the

dark? I put them all over a ceiling once, and delighted in their scattering shining. But I've been told that, if they don't get sunlight to renew them they'll eventually stop glowing. Their light, like the light on Moses's face, is a reflection.

Paul gives this story an interesting twist. Paul sees the veil as a symbol for something that keeps the people from understanding the law. He sees the veil, not over Moses' face, but over people's minds. The people of Israel were therefore in the dark. They couldn't understand, much less, obey, the commandments.

We can understand that, can't we? Don't we sometimes feel that there's something between us and God, something that keeps us from understanding? Sometimes we read the Bible, and we see the words alright, but the meaning escapes us. Or we hear the story of Jesus's transfiguration and, like Peter and James and John, we're clueless about what it means. Or we begin to pray and a veil of thoughts about the next meal or our favorite TV show distracts us.

But Paul gives us hope. He tells us that when we turn to Christ, the veil is removed. Listen to these marvelous words: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another."

Our friend Jim showed us slides of his trip to Peru. In the ruins of Machu Pichu there is a courtyard with circular depressions. Experts believe that these were filled with water, so the astronomers could look into them and see the reflection of the stars and study them more closely. Paul is saying that Jesus came to earth so that we could see in him, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord. But, seeing this glory we're transformed? Well, it did happen to Moses.

But then we turn to the gospel, to that amazing and mysterious account of the Transfiguration. The three disciples beheld Jesus' glory alright, but, at the time, it didn't seem to change them. Instead, it mystified them, and, after a silly remark of Peter's, it reduced them to silence. They did get a clear message from God. "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Moses came down the mountain with the commandments, the words from God.

This time God doesn't give words; God points to The Word. This time God doesn't give instructions; God says, "The instructions will come from my son." This time we don't have rules to obey we have a Person to listen to and to learn from and to follow.

But maybe the disciples' very obtuseness is a source of hope for us. They didn't understand right away, either. They had to make the long frightening road to Jerusalem, they had to endure disappointment and despair, before they could begin to understand, to could begin to look at the resurrected Christ, could began being transformed from one degree of glory into another. But it did happen. Like Moses, they finally began to focus on Christ and not on themselves and what place they'd have in the kingdom. They began to think about doing the Lord's work and the Lord's will, rather than about themselves. And they began to shine--to shine with the reflected glory of their Lord.

Like the disciples, like the Corinthians, we can have our veils removed by Christ. We are not to assume that this removal will be immediate. Paul cautions us that the transformation is neither easy nor smooth. The change we experience through Christ is a process of moving from one degree of glory to another. But it happened to them, and it can happen to us.

And, God willing, we can then reflect that light to others, so that they, too, can know the light. John Ruskin lived in the time when English villages were lighted by gas lamps that had to be individually lit each evening. He was once talking with a friends as the lamp lighter moved slowly on a distant hill. Ruskin said, "There is what I mean by being a real Christian. a Christian' s course can be traced by the lights that are left burning."

One of our own Ed Williams, found that to be true about himself. While attending the Johnson College reunion he meet a former student who had been a terror. She'd gotten into all kinds of trouble. At one point they were about to expel her, but they said, "We can't inflict you on another college." Ed was surprised to discover that she'd become a very successful attorney. She said to him. "You are the one who turned my life around." Ed was stunned. He couldn't remember anything he'd said or done that would have had such an impact. You see, Ed wasn't thinking about being important--about being crucial in someone's life. Ed was thinking about being faithful to God and and serving his students. And Ed reflected the light of his Lord. He shone!

God grant that we can become good reflectors, as well.