

2nd Sunday of Lent “The Transfiguration, the Mystery of Pi and Glimpsing Eternity”

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Few people realize that there is a major international holiday coming up this Tuesday. In addition to being the Tuesday after the Second Sunday of Lent, it will also be (wait for it, drum roll please) Pi day! Yes, Tuesday will be a day to celebrate Pi. And it is easy to confuse this with a nice slice of dessert, something that should be avoided during Lent anyway. No, Tuesday will be the fourteenth of March, 3/14 as it were, so we are talking about a significant number in mathematics worthy of celebration. How significant a number, you may wonder? If you take the circumference of a circle, any true circle, doesn't matter the size, and divide the circumference by the circle's diameter, the number will be a smidgen higher than 3.14; however, the number of digits following 3.14 continue on for an eternity. As many of you know, I am not exaggerating. Super computers have calculated the value of Pi to over a trillion digits, and Pi keeps on going. That is what I call a lot of Pi! What is really interesting about the number Pi is that the numbers do not seem to settle into a repeatable pattern, different numbers just continue popping up for eternity. Perhaps it is God's sense of humor that Albert Einstein's birthday was March 14th. The greatest mathematician who ever lived was born on Pi day. Quite fitting. As a theologian, it gives me comfort that sometimes the answers science gives us point us to an eternal reality.

The magnificence of the circle has also been used in art to depict eternal truths. Take this copper icon on our ambo here. You see the image of Jesus enthroned with two gold circles uniting. The 3.14 explanation of this is: The gold circles represent the marriage of divinity and humanity in the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. When we unpack the meaning of what this means for us Christians well, we might as well try to calculate Pi, because the well goes that deep.

Same can be said with the mystery of our lives. “The Lord said to Abram: Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you”. Come on Abram, pack up your family and servants, leave your house and travel into the wilderness on a dangerous odyssey of discovery to a land you do not know about, but I'll show you! It makes me sometimes wonder how many doors God had to knock on before he got someone to say “yes”. Abram said yes and rightfully becomes for us the father of faith because of his trust in God. God promises that his descendants will outnumber the stars in the heaven and grains of sand on the seashore. Abram doesn't need a calculator to quantify this number. Abram simply trusts and he was grateful that he did.

Jesus took Peter, James and John his brother and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. The message? Jesus Christ is fully divine. Moses and Elijah appear conversing with Jesus. The message? Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. A bright cloud cast a shadow over them and from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my

beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” Peter, James and John fall prostrate to the ground as befitting a creature before his creator. And then a peculiar thing happens. The Gospel says, Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and do not be afraid.” Jesus touched them. Touch. The message? Jesus is also fully human. This is what our two gold circles on this icon represent. Jesus is fully divine and fully human. A relationship with Jesus is to be touched by the divine.

We have all heard about the circle of life. We are born, we live and we die. It is therefore comforting to me that if you divide the circumference of a circle by its diameter, you get an infinite number, like a soul touched by God. Peter, James and John are led up a high mountain where Jesus can touch them and see the world through his eyes. And after a glimpse of eternity, Peter speaks for all of us. “Lord it is good that we are here. Let me set up tents so that we can stay here, stay in this moment forever”. Most of us have had a mountain top experience at some point when we felt touched by God. When these moments happen, we want to draw a circle around us and stay in the moment. Ask yourself, when were these moments for you? It might have been a powerful prayer experience when you were younger. It might have been the day you first met you’re future spouse. It might have been witnessing the birth of your child. It might have been the day of your baptism or confirmation. The Gospel invites us to recall these mountain top experiences when God’s purpose for us was clear. These moments give us strength and consolation for the great journey that lies ahead of us, because we can’t stay in these moments although we wish we could.

Like Peter, James and John, we cannot stay on the mountain top as long as we would like. Like Abram, we are touched by God and then invited to pick up our walking stick and travel to the land that God will show us. We call that faith. For Peter, James and John, the journey after the transfiguration led them to the foot of the cross and the glory of the resurrection. What they saw with their eyes, we are called to believe in faith. When divinity touches humanity, death is transfigured to life. Mortality is transfigured to immortality. If you do the math, it is like trying to calculate pi. The numbers go on for eternity.

I find this insight helpful because how often in our lives do we find ourselves locked in another kind of circle? The circle where we brood over our own crosses over and over, suffering from past hurts that haunt our memory. This second Sunday of Lent, Jesus has led us up a mountain side and has given us a glimpse of eternity, and with this a glimpse of hope. What are the areas in our lives that need the grace of transfiguration right now as we make our Lenten pilgrimage to Holy Week? We are encouraged by the words of St. Paul to Timothy, “Beloved: bear your share of hardship for the Gospel with the strength that comes from God. He saved us and called us to a holy life, not according to our works, but according to his own design and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began...” Before time began, St. Paul says. The invitation this week is to calculate that! By accepting God’s invitation to embrace the gift of faith, God welcomes us into his equation of love that goes on forever.