

There were 12 apostles, and within that group there was an inner circle. They appear and reappear constantly throughout the Gospels: Peter, James, and John. James and John were the sons of Zebedee, brothers. So when it came to the Transfiguration, they were the three Jesus took with Him to the top of the mountain. The Gospel says that He was transfigured in their presence, and they were absolutely astounded. His physical, human appearance changed, and He became like the risen body. Remember after the Resurrection when Jesus appeared to His disciples, they didn't recognize Him; He had changed in some fashion. It doesn't explain how He had changed, but His appearance had changed. It was only when He did ordinary things with which they were familiar that they began to realize this is Jesus. For example, Mary Magdalene, when He said her name, or the two on the road to Emmaus, when He broke the bread with them.

Moses and Elijah were present with him. They symbolized: Moses, the Law of the Old Testament; Elijah, the prophets, the teachers of the Old Testament; and then Jesus in the middle, the completion of the work of redemption. Part of the reason for the Transfiguration was to prepare them for what was coming next, which was Calvary, when He would die on the cross. He had already warned them that they would see the sign of Jonah the prophet. Jonah was in the belly of the big fish for three days. Jesus would be in the earth for three days, and then would rise again, so that was the sign of Jonah the prophet. He was trying to get them ready for that, and let them know the message of the Father: "This is my beloved Son; listen to Him."

But it didn't work. When they got to Jerusalem, and Jesus was arrested and taken to Caiaphas' palace, James was nowhere to be found. Peter was there. So was John. John was a friend of the High Priest, so he probably felt he was pretty safe. Peter went along, but then when the serving woman said, "Hey, you're a Galilean, you must be one of His people." Peter denied Him three times. Now we're down to one. John stayed with Him through it all, up to and including when He was dying on the cross. But one out of three is not a great track record when you stop to think about it.

So the gospel today shows that the spectacular, even a huge miracle, like occurred on Tabor, does not have the ability to attract us and more importantly to keep us. It may mesmerize us for a moment but it doesn't last. The only thing that has the power to sustain is what those three men on Tabor heard. The voice of the Father saying, "This is my beloved Son; listen to Him." Don't look for miracles. Don't look for apparitions. Listen to Him.

Now then the question becomes where to we hear Him? Well, that's fairly simple in one way, not so easy in another. One of the places where we hear Him is in the Scriptures, for example in the Gospel story today. The other area in which we hear Him is in the Church. It's called Tradition, but we're talking about oral tradition, not something we usually do as a family tradition. John says in his Gospel that everything that was written here was said and done, but not everything that was said and done is written here. He says: if it were to be written, the whole world couldn't contain the number of books it would take to include it. The belief of the Church is that those teachings, the non-written teachings, are what we call Tradition, the Oral Tradition. So you have the Written Tradition and the Oral Tradition. Now the Oral Tradition comes to us through the Church. It's that combination of the two that actually enables us to listen to Jesus. "This is my beloved Son; listen to Him."

We're supposed to listen to Him all the time. But it's particularly important during the season of Lent. Because this is a time when, to a greater extent, hopefully, we focus more on hearing the message of Jesus.

So through the course of Lent, maybe we can find some way of going back over the Gospels, or all the readings, actually, but the Gospels in particular because that's where we hear Jesus. The Gospels of the Sundays of Lent. You can find it on the internet. Go to the USCCB, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. There's a link on there called Catholic Scripture readings. Take a few minutes, but don't just read the Gospel. You've got to read it prayerfully, because there's a message there for us that we're not going to get if we pick it up and read it like we're going to read a novel. Pick it up or look at it on the screen and read it prayerfully, because that's the process through which Jesus will speak to us. "This is my beloved Son; listen to Him."