

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT. 2026

The Lord Jesus' Transfiguration gave a hint of the Divine glory that would fully be His after His human Death and glorious Resurrection. The Lord Jesus instructed the chosen band who had witnessed His Transfiguration to tell no one of the vision until after His Resurrection. Before that, there would have to be His Passion and Cross. First, the battle, and then the triumph.

It might be said that Lent is a season for concentrating on the battle of living a Christian life. This is a very particular kind of battle. In it, we face opponents, both human and demonic. We must fight them. At the same time, we must not hate even our demonic opponents, and we must actually love our human opponents. Love them! This combination of combat and love is at the heart of Christian life, and is only possible by the powerful Grace poured out on us in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

On March 6, the entire Catholic Church commemorates Sts. Perpetua and Felicity and their Companions, martyred in Roman Carthage in 203. After the Sacred Scriptures, one of the great treasures we have from the early Church is St. Perpetua's prison journal, written as the days of her martyrdom approached, and then smuggled out to the Christian community of Carthage. Towards the end of her prison journal, St. Perpetua describes a vivid dream she had. At a lower level, the dream suggests that even a young, devoutly Christian lady of Roman Carthage might have seen some of the mixed boxing and wrestling fights that were a less guilty entertainment than the gladiatorial fights, not to mention the deeply vile entertainment of watching wild beasts devour criminals, including St. Perpetua's companions.

In her dream she seemed to be in Carthage's amphitheater, with a huge crowd watching. She recounted that, although "I was condemned to the beasts. . . there were none set loose on me." She wondered about that briefly, then her dream continued.

"Then there came out an ugly Egyptian with his attendants to fight against me. A group of good looking young men came to be my attendants. And I was stripped and then changed into a man, and my attendants rubbed me down with oil for the fight. And I saw the Egyptian opposite me [getting ready for the fight] . . . And there came forward a man wonderfully tall . . . and he was carrying a rod like a trainer, and a green bough on which there were golden apples. Having called for silence, he said . . . 'if she overcome him, she shall have this bough' . . . And he withdrew. And we approached each other, and we began to use our fists. My opponent tried to grab my leg, but I kicked him in the face . . . [eventually] I joined my hands on his head, linking my fingers. And I pressed on his head and he fell on his face, and I pressed his head down. And the people shouted and my attendants sang Psalms. And I came forward to the Trainer, and received the bough with the golden apples. And, kissing me, he said 'Peace be with you daughter', and I began in triumph to go towards the Gate of Life, and so I awoke."

Reflecting on her vivid dream at the end of her prison journal, St. Perpetua wrote "I saw that I should not fight with beasts but with the devil: but I knew that the victory would be mine. I have written this up to the day before the games. Of what was done in the games themselves, let him write who will."

All of us have to fight against evil in this life. Usually our immediate opponents are human beings, people who persecute us, people who tempt us, people who pressure us, and people who fight us simply for attempting, with God's help, to do what is right and just. Behind

those human opponents, however, lurks our real enemy. With him, there can only be a fight, and a fight to the finish. There is no possibility of a draw in that battle. Without God's Grace, poured out through the Spirit of Jesus Christ, there is no possibility of victory. With God's Grace, there is no possibility of defeat. Though not easy, the way to victory for us is simple: be guided by God's word, contained especially in the Sacred Scriptures; be nourished by God's Grace, especially in the Holy Sacraments; and never give up - keep fighting!

On March 3, the Catholic Church in England honors St. Ailred of Rievaulx, a very great English monk and abbot of the 12th Century. He is known for preaching the importance of holy friendship in his works "De Spiritualia Amicitia" (On Spiritual Friendship) and "Speculum Caritatis" (The Mirror of Love). In the course of "Speculum Caritatis", St. Ailred reminds us that hatred is infinitely weaker than Divine Love, and that, in God, we must love even our human enemies, perhaps even while we have to fight them. Loving our human enemies extends to interpreting their actions and motives in the most favorable light possible. St. Ailred shows how the Lord Jesus did this on the Cross.

On the Cross, the Lord Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Commenting on this sacred sentence, St. Ailred observes,

"It was not enough to pray for them: He also wanted to make an excuse for them. FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING. They are great sinners, yes, but they know so very little, therefore, FATHER, FORGIVE THEM. They are nailing Me to a Cross, but they do not know Who it is that they are nailing me to a Cross, for, IF THEY HAD KNOWN, THEY WOULD NEVER HAVE CRUCIFIED THE LORD OF GLORY, therefore, FATHER, FORGIVE THEM. They think that they are executing a criminal, a mad imposter claiming to be God, a seducer of the People. My Face is hidden from them, and they do not see My glory, therefore, FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING"

Peter, John, and James received a glimpse of Jesus' true glory at the Transfiguration. Their true greatness did not come from that glimpse, however, but from their ability, inspired and assisted by His Grace, to conquer their sinful tendencies. How can we conquer our sinful tendencies? St. Ailred gives us the answer: by enlarging the whole horizon of our love, so that, with Jesus' help, we can love every single human being as Jesus loves them. Our true holiness and happiness both consist in becoming able, with Jesus, to love even our enemies, not only praying for them, but interpreting everything they say and do in the most favorable way possible. They may still be enemies for now, but not, by God's Grace, forever. By God's Grace love conquers sin and hate, as love conquered on the Cross of Christ. Love, Divine Love, in the end really does conquer all.

If we want to have this Divine Love, it is ours for the asking. Ask, and you shall receive! Let us ask for that love, looking forward to the Lord's Resurrection, recalling the Lord's Transfiguration, but with our eyes focused on the loving Passion and Cross of Jesus, our beloved Lord and Savior.