

I know a priest— a bit older than I am – who for years and years would talk about his retirement, how he was looking forward to it, what he would do in it. Literally every conversation I had with him would include some time on the subject. That always struck me as sad. I thought to myself, “What about right now? What about being a priest in your parish today – how’s that going? Do you get any pleasure from that?” I mean, there are so many occasions to see God’s grace available in our day to day life as priests. And he wasn’t the only example I’ve encountered of priests with that attitude.

Those priests, preachers of the Word and ministers of the mysteries, I personally see as particularly sad cases, but I don’t think that they’re so unusual. How many of us are living for our retirement? We put up with our job (which seems like a slog), only because somewhere down the line there’s hope for something better – a little cabin or condo in our favorite place, a move to a sunnier climate?

Or maybe we live for the weekend. Monday through Friday is a meaningless grind, but I shut off my mind to it and daydream about what will happen on Saturday and Sunday. The problem is that when we live with our eyes only on the future we're in danger of missing out on most of what God wants to do in our lives here and now.

As always on the second Sunday of Lent we hear today in the gospel the story of the Transfiguration. "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." What this experience does is to give the Apostles a taste of heaven – right now, while they are still here on earth in the middle of their struggles.

It's important to learn from the Transfiguration that the life of a Christian is about fullness of life – heaven - right here and now. Sometimes the world portrays the Christian as a person who has a horrible, pleasure-less life in this world just so he or she can enjoy

heaven later (think about the person in the dead-end job who lives for retirement). And some of us buy into that false idea of Christianity. Of course, the fullness of glory won't be experienced until after this life. We're to look forward, past death. But not to the exclusion of today's grace and taste of heaven.

We should ask ourselves this Lent, "In my spiritual life am I living for retirement? Is my life directed to the future but ignoring the possibilities of finding grace in the small moments of today? Is my religious life aimed at doing just what it takes to get to heaven, but not so much at trying to encounter Jesus right now?"

I've just finished a book by Fr. John Riccardo entitled, Heaven Starts Now. In the book, Fr. Riccardo makes the telling point that too many of us Catholics talk and think about "getting to heaven," as if heaven is only a destination in our future. Then this life is a job – and heaven is like retirement where I can finally live. How many of us think of the living of our Christian faith as checking off boxes, following rules,

meeting the goals – just so I can get the big pay-off when I die? If that's so, it's sad, because, as Fr. Riccardo says, heaven is meant to start now, in this life, today, even in this passing world of pain and failure. Jesus wants to take us each up that mountain and reveal Himself to us.

That is what we are supposed to be about here at Holy Family – a place where we can learn how to go up the mountain with Jesus and experience right now, in this moment, something of the grace that will flood us after this life is over. My point in today's homily is just to call for an attitude adjustment -- to open our hearts to Jesus right now.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical on evangelization, says the core of the gospel message is, "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen, and free you." Jesus is beside us every day, hoping to do incredible things for us. So, like Peter, James, and John "Rise and don't be afraid."

Deacon Steve Mitchell, the national coordinator for Alpha in a Catholic Context, will be speaking at our parish on Friday night, March 17, after stations of the cross. He will speak about what Pope Francis is talking about, living and sharing with others that core message of the gospel – that Jesus wants to bring us to heaven even in this life.

But even more important than one talk, or even the season of Lent when we're supposed to be searching for Christ in a determined way, is to remember the basic purpose of our prayer, the sacraments, and our acts of charity – to go up the mountain with Christ so as to encounter and feel His glory. That is what changes lives. Don't waste this life – waiting for the next. Freedom, strength, healing, glory, heaven, can start now if we seek them in Jesus our Savior, who is already beside us.