We come together to celebrate the 2nd Sunday of Lent. Lent is a time to prepare for the great Feast of the Resurrection by fasting, special prayer and almsgiving. In our Gospel today, Jesus clearly shows us that, like him, we too will someday be transfigured, offers us hope that we will enjoy his future glory.

Now, to a lot of us older Catholics, Lent has meant a time of giving up our favorite foods, or when we were younger, our favorite candy and not eating meat on Fridays and generally giving our time and money to those in need even when our schedules are already so busy and we seem to have trouble making ends meet financially. Lent was truly a time that none of us looked forward to and many of us had a hard time with what seemed to be the mandates of the Church to suffer!

Today the Church teaches us that Lent is a time to better define ourselves as Christians, that is to learn to be more Christ-like in our daily lives. Lent is a time to redefine our lives by understanding that love is our destination and hope is our driving force that propels us through life’s difficulties. We are drawn to understanding that prayer, fasting and almsgiving help us to understand, as St. Paul wrote, that Jesus will transform our earthly bodies to be like his glorified body. The Church does not “mandate” our action during Lent but merely offers guidelines to better prepare ourselves for our Transformation.

A missionary once told this tale. Some Christians were sitting about at a retreat. The subject was how best to spread the faith. Various methods were suggested running from literature to videos to radio announcements. Finally a young woman arose. She said, “When we judge a village is ready for the Lord, the first people we send in is a Christian family. It is their lives that will inspire the villagers to think seriously about becoming Christian. They are better than a hundred books or videos or radio ads. They will be the keyhole through which others will see the Lord Jesus. To spread the Church, we Christians must not so much promote as attract.” The woman’s views carried the day.
As Albert Schweitzer testified, “Example is not the main thing. It is the only thing.” This then is what we are aiming for while we are in the early days of Lent. Like Christ in today’s Gospel, we too must become transfigured. The Teacher is saying to us, “Do not dwell on my Transfiguration too long today. Rather continue or perhaps begin to work on your own transfiguration.”

This Lenten season we are called to become better Christians, that is, better imitators of Christ, not by suffering and pain but by returning to the basics of our faith and living our faith so that others may see and follow our example. We as parents and grandparents are called to educate our children by the way we live our faith. We do not have to “preach” to teach. We merely have to demonstrate by example.

One American government official describes the current scene in our country this way. “In this country, it is impossible to maintain civilization with 12 year olds having babies, with 15 year olds killing each other, with 17 year olds dying of AIDS, with 18 year olds ending up with diplomas they can’t even read and with children of all ages addicted to and dying from drugs.” And as a deacon, I must add, that fewer and fewer of our young see any need to attend Sunday Liturgy because their parents do not demonstration any motivation. And many times parents don’t understand that the example they show their children, of all ages; leaving early from Sunday Mass, standing in the back when seats are available and not participating in the prayers and hymns work to separate the youth from our community. This same US Secretary of Education further stated, “If ever this society was in need of better Christians it is now. If all Catholics were to live their faith, it would transform American society.”

Today as we recall Jesus’ transfiguration let us say in our hearts “it is good that we are here.” And this Lent let us examine our actions and make sure we are giving good examples to all who may see us that they may know that we are Christians.

As we move on in our celebration of the Eucharist, the transforming of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, let us remember this message from an unknown author as we go about transforming our lives; the Jesus you wish to imitate came not to dominate but to motivate, not to condemn but to forgive, not to oppress but to free and not to force but to teach.