

EPIPHANY LAST, Feb. 19, 2023, Year A

- Some years ago, I once again had the opportunity to see the Golden Gate Bridge, and to experience the magic of driving over it. This magnificent bridge lies over the passage between San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean. I lived in the Bay area for two years when I was very young. And during my childhood, we sailed from or to San Francisco on our our Japan voyages. About the only thing more memorable than driving over the Golden Gate Bridge may be passing under it on an ocean-going ship. I was lucky enough to have that experience five times before I was a teenager.
- Many of us assume the name for the bridge is related to its warm color. But the name comes from the ocean straight over which it stands. Knowing that, one might imagine that the seagoing passage under it was called the Golden Gate because of the Gold Rush. But, actually, it was named even *before* the Gold Rush.¹ Rather than mimicking gold, the bridge's official color is "International Orange," which was chosen to contrast with fog.² A story is told about when that color was first applied. Painters dabbed splotches of it on the heads of curious seagulls. Pretty soon, Bay Area birdwatchers reported a new bird species, which was called the *California Red-Headed seagull*!
- Until 1964, the Golden Gate Bridge had the longest main span in the world (*I invite you to look at the photos I have provided*). Yet, its basic design isn't unique. We know this from photos of similar bridges that have two main towers, steadied in place by their suspension cables, which are anchored in the ground. From their anchor points, these 36" diameter cables ascend to the top of the towers, and then gently descend again to the center of the bridge. From that low point, they again soar up, to the top of the opposite tower. The slightly arched roadway across is literally suspended from these main cables, by small support cables that hang from them. Here, in the beauty of this simple design, we find a helpful spiritual and liturgical metaphor.

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- I would like you to reflect for a moment about two Sundays in the church year. One is *today*, and the other is *Easter Day*. Today is the *last* Sunday *before* the season of Lent, and Easter Day lies ahead as the *first* Sunday *after* Lent. Imagine these two Sundays on our calendar, as being like the two towers of the Golden Gate Bridge. Today, *Transfiguration Sunday*, coming just before Lent, is like the south tower of that bridge, on the urban, San Francisco, side of the straight. And, *Easter Sunday* is like the north tower of the bridge, on the less familiar and historically rural side of that navigational channel. The season of Lent stretches between these two Sundays like the main span of a bridge. Here is the crucial part ~ every year we need to make this liturgical crossing. And, like the great towers of a bridge, Transfiguration Sunday and Easter Sunday uphold us all the way across our Lenten journey.
- We see Jesus in our imaginations as he is revealed in Transfiguration glory on the mountain top. With him and the disciples, we ascend to a Gospel spiritual 'highpoint.' It's noteworthy that, in Luke, the story comes as part of Jesus' turn toward Jerusalem, and the "exodus" he will accomplish there.³ In the first three Gospels, the Transfiguration accompanies his predictions of the suffering he will endure. So, on this Sunday just before Lent, spiritually and liturgically, we ascend to the same Gospel 'high-point.' And then, on Easter Sunday, we commemorate and imagine the glory of Jesus' first resurrection appearance after his death, in the greatest Gospel highpoint.
- But, in between, we transition from the joys of his ministry, to the adversity and sorrows of his Passion. Precisely because, during Lent and Holy Week, we descend with him into all the issues surrounding his death, liturgically we are graced to ascend with him— before and after Lent— to see his glory. On our reflective journey through Lent we are supported by both of these 'towering' high points, one that lies just behind us, and one that lies just ahead. We experience the liturgical equivalent of driving across the Golden Gate Bridge.

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- Driving north, through central San Francisco, the great towers of the Golden Gate Bridge suddenly appear through gaps between buildings and trees. The towers' stunning size and warm color provide confidence. They assure us that the bridge span between them will get us up and over the deep and cold waters below. Like the Transfiguration, the first tower introduces us to what this is all about—a safe passage and deliverance through adversity, despite apparent risks. Like Easter, the second tower is not the journey's end. For landfall is still a ways off, and the road stretches ahead, into the hills just beyond.
- Journeying through the seasons, we come to this point every year. We see the Transfiguration of Jesus and, beyond it, Easter Sunday. These two Sundays rise up above the series of Sundays around and between them. With these two Sundays, the liturgical year helps us see properly the stretch of time between them. Staying faithful in worship and fellowship, with our siblings in Christ, we journey through Lent, which can be a season of spiritual challenge. And just like that second tower of the bridge, Easter Sunday is our gateway to an extended journey. For the road ahead stretches out toward Pentecost and to new life beyond. As we prayed in our collect this morning, grant "that we, beholding by faith the light of [Jesus'] countenance, may be... changed into his likeness from glory to glory..."

Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

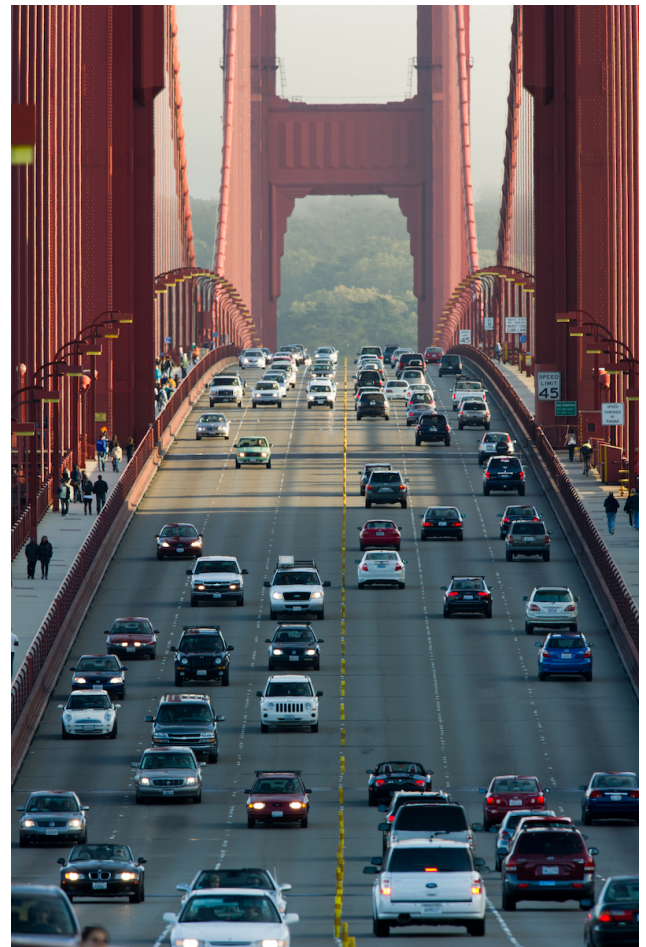
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Notes:

¹ According to the Wikipedia article, "Golden Gate": 'On 1 July 1846, before the discovery of gold in California, the entrance acquired a new name. In his memoirs, John C. Frémont wrote, "To this Gate I gave the name of "Chrysopylae", or "Golden Gate"; for the same reasons that the harbor of Byzantium was called Chrysoceras, or Golden Horn."'

² The color formula is available: <http://goldengatebridge.org/research/factsGGBIntOrngColor.php>

³ See Luke 9:28-36, where during the Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah "appeared in glory and were speaking of his *departure*, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem." The Greek word, here rendered as "departure," is *exodon*, a variation of the word *exodus*.



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