

## **Feast of Transfiguration August 06, 2017 (18th Sunday of the year)**

Daniel 7, 9-10, 13-14; 2 Peter 1, 16-19; Matt 17, 1-9

Christ's Tabor radiance is a kind of mirror in which we glimpse the glory that God wills to give his friends. The resplendence of the Transfiguration reveals the fullness of life destined to be ours. The transfiguration story is recorded in the three synoptic gospels almost word per word. Jesus takes his three favourite apostles up a high mountain and the apostles were privileged to witness the inner life of Christ, when his splendour was revealed to them in this holy place. He is transfigured and glorified before their very eyes. In a short interval they become aware of the divinity of Jesus. They see Jesus in a new way that was humanly unimaginable and they want to stay there forever. As we celebrate this great event we pray for a deeper experience of God in our own lives, and to share in his divine life.

Transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor was his exultation. It is rich in material for reflection and contemplation. He invited his disciples to have a glimpse of his glory. There is always something awe-inspiring about mountains. On the top the air is clean and crisp. The panoramic view of the surrounding country-side lifts us from the hustle and bustle of the rat-race, and raises our mind and heart to God. The top of a mountain is a natural place for encountering God. It is small wonder then that in the Bible God often chooses a mountain top to reveal Himself and His plans. Mountain indicates the divine presence. It was on Mount Sinai that God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses. Jesus gave his first teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. He was crucified on Mount Calvary and ascended to heaven from Mount Olivet. In transfiguration on the mountain we experience the divine presence and his closeness to us.

Prophet Daniel in the first reading speaks of the divine person sitting on his throne, whose clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. The scene presents the glory of the divine person. He explains how a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. He further adds the vision of the one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed. This speaks of the future glory that is to come to Jesus who is the king of all.

In the second reading Apostle Peter presents to his community the events he and his companions had witnessed on the mountain. He indicates that it is no cleverly devised myth but a truth they had personally witnessed and experienced in his company. For Peter this was the great moment of experience from the life of Jesus. It was the moment Jesus received the commission from his Father. For Peter explains that Jesus received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." They, the three apostles heard this voice come from heaven, while they were with him on the holy mountain and had the prophetic message

more fully confirmed. He calls upon his community to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in their hearts. Transfiguration is the foretelling of the events to come and the Lord will come in the same way at his final coming.

In today's Gospel we are told of Jesus being transfigured before his three apostles on Mount Tabor. These Three were invited on three separate occasions into three privileged moments in the life of Jesus. They were handpicked each time personally by Our Lord. The three whom he chose were Peter, James and John. They were present at the home of a synagogue official Jairus when his daughter was brought back to life. When Jairus first implored Our Lord to cure his daughter he went with his disciples but at the miracle time he chose these three only. Again they were with him in the agony of the garden. This was to be a preparation for that ordeal. Finally they were present at the mountain of transfiguration where Moses and Elijah were also present speaking with Jesus about his approaching death. In the presence of these two, Moses representing the law and Elijah representing the prophets the voice of the Father was heard, "This is my beloved son listen to him." Slowly, the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant was taking place. Jesus came not to destroy the law and the prophets but to bring them to completion. Christianity is not to be an abstract creed or code but a Person. Jesus Christ, true God and true man is to be "the way, the truth and the life." The injunction is very clear: We are to listen to Him and follow Him. The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that "In times past God spoke to us through the prophets...but in these last days through his Son."

For Jesus the Transfiguration was the turning point in his life. Until now all was onward and upward. He was captivating the people with his preaching and miracles. Now he must descend to the valley, to the road to Gethsemane and go to Calvary. The Transfiguration gave Jesus a foretaste of his glory, and in the strength of that joy he could endure the cross and despise the shame. But most of all the Transfiguration gave Jesus another affirmation of his Father's love. At His baptism in the river Jordan his Father had affirmed him as his beloved Son on whom his favor rests. Now they hear the words of the Father once again: "This is my beloved son, listen to him." They have a task to listen attentively to his words and put them into practice.

For the apostles it was an awe-inspiring experience. They had never seen their master like this before. Peter, filled with consolation says, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. Let us erect three booths here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." They wanted to remain in this ecstasy forever. But it is not to be. This is only a preparation for things to come. With Jesus they must descend the mountain to the valley below and on to the garden of Gethsemane and Calvary. On Mount Tabor they didn't want to leave. In the Garden of Gethsemane they didn't want to stay. When Jesus was arrested they all fled. Here we can all identify with the apostles because in our mountain-top experiences of joy and consolation we also want to stay. We want them to go on forever. And then in the moments of trial we want to flee. We forget that our Lord did not promise us a rose garden, but a garden of olives filled with pain and a crown of thorns. When he calls his followers to be his close associates he says "If anyone will come after me let him pick up his cross daily and follow me." The disciples got a preview of the glory of

Jesus risen from the dead and his glory in heaven. It was also a preview of the glory we all hope to share in heaven. This was a very special grace for Peter and James and John.

The Transfiguration was the mountain-top experience of the apostles which prepared them for their future trials. The Mass is our mountain-top experience which prepares us for the trials of our day. The Mass is not a transfiguration but a transubstantiation, in which bread and wine are transformed into the glorious Risen Jesus. And in the joy and consolation of Communion we say with Peter, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." And we do not want to leave. But it is not to be. Soon we will hear the words, "The Mass is ended. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." So we pick up our cross and leave to face the trials of the day. But having been to the top of the mountain we know that "nothing can separate us from the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The temporal and spatial setting of the transfiguration narrative is important for its understanding. Six days after Peter's confession of the messiahship of Jesus, and his announcement of the coming passion and the proclamation of the rigorous demands of the discipleship this event is said to have happened. Just before receiving this special grace of seeing Jesus transfigured, Jesus told his disciples that he must suffer greatly, be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes, be killed and rise after three days. How did they react? Peter rebuked Jesus for saying this and Jesus responded, "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." The disciples had to learn that Jesus was not exactly the type of Messiah that they were expecting. Instead of being a Messiah to liberate Palestine from Roman domination he told them he would be a suffering Messiah and would be executed. What a shock! That was surely a bit much to take. Immediately following this we read that Peter, James and John saw Jesus transfigured. How they needed this grace now. They had left everything to follow Jesus and he had just told them he would be killed. They needed reassurance, and Jesus did not let them down. They received a huge grace now on the mountain as they saw Jesus transfigured.

Moses and Elijah also appeared and spoke with Jesus. In the popular tradition they were the forerunners of the messiah. The high Mountain is the symbol of Sinai and Jesus is the new Moses who has reached the mountain. Moses received the Law from God on Mount Sinai and Elijah could be regarded as the greatest of the prophets, certainly here he is a representative of the prophets during Jesus' transfiguration. So we have the Law and the Prophets, as the Old Testament was often called, with Jesus on the mountain. The Old Testament was pointing forward to Jesus as we heard in that beautiful prophecy of Jesus in our first reading from Dan 7. Now two great figures of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah, appeared on the mountain with Jesus transfigured, to confirm that Jesus is indeed the expected Messiah. The cloud stands for the Shekinah the symbol of God's presence. God himself declares Jesus as his Son the beloved, the chosen person. The disciples have the task of listening to him. So the Old Testament and the Father in heaven are now confirming that Jesus is indeed the expected Messiah. Although Jesus had just shocked them by telling them he must suffer and die, this is, in fact, the plan of God for Jesus. The Father said, "Listen to him." In other words, "Do not be scandalized at the teaching of my son Jesus about his forthcoming Passion, death and resurrection." As our

preface today says, "He revealed his glory to his disciples, To strengthen them for the scandal of the cross."

Will they listen to Jesus? Will they stand by Jesus as he goes to his Passion and death? We know the story. Peter denied Jesus in the courtyard of the high priest and James, like the rest of the disciples, abandoned Jesus. Only John listened to Jesus and was not scandalized by the passion and death of Jesus. In John's Gospel we read that John went right into the courtyard of the high priest while Jesus was being tried and went all the way to the cross of Jesus with the holy women. When the crunch came between Holy Thursday night and the first appearance of Jesus on Easter Sunday, Peter and James did not listen, they abandoned Jesus. Their abandonment of Jesus was only temporary, while John remained faithful right during Jesus' Passion. Later all three of them, Peter, James and John became great witnesses to Jesus. Peter became the first Pope and bishop of Rome. James was executed in Jerusalem by King Herod for witnessing to Jesus (Acts 12:2) and John authored the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John. So the three disciples did listen to Jesus although two of them were temporarily unfaithful during the Passion of Jesus.

The momentary vision of Christ was given in order to strengthen the three disciples to face the trials to their faith, namely the suffering and the crucifixion which Jesus would experience. For the very reason the story of the transfiguration is given to us at the early part of lent to encourage us to persevere in our Lenten mortifications. Soon Easter will come but we have gone strong with the suffering we will be strong with the resurrection too. Perhaps we are disappointed that the disciples did not listen to Jesus, did not remain faithful to Jesus, during the time he most needed them. They had seen Jesus transfigured, they heard the command of the Father to listen to Jesus, they had been with Jesus for other intimate moments like the raising of the girl to life again but they were scandalized by the Passion of Jesus. But why should we be disappointed with them? We also have experienced and met Jesus in many ways and sometimes we too let him down.

We meet Jesus in the Scriptures as they touch our hearts. Jesus speaks to us now when we read the Scriptures. The Scriptures are not just about the life of Jesus; in the Scriptures Jesus also speaks to us about our lives and in them we meet Jesus as he speaks to us about our lives. Christ has invited us to carry our cross daily and to follow him. It is a challenge he places on to us. The one accepts his cross to go with Christ will surely experience the smoothness and easiness of the cross in our life. Then let the thought of transfiguration encourage each one of us today, to do the little God demands of us, so that when we pass out of this life we may be assured of seeing Christ in his glory, ready to welcome us into his eternal and glorious Kingdom. A poor illiterate man wanted to be baptized. The parish priest asked him many questions to see whether he was fit for baptism. "Where was Jesus born? How many apostles did he have? How many years did he live? Where did he die? The poor man knew nothing of all these questions. Irritated, the priest then said, "At least you know prayers like the Our Father and the I Believe"? The man again shook his head. "What do you know then?" asked the priest flabbergasted. The man explained, "Before I met Jesus I was a drunkard who beat up my wife and children; I lost

my job and was wasting my life.” Then he continued, “But after encountering Jesus, I’ve quit drinking. I work hard and have begun to love my family. For me Jesus is my personal Saviour!”

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