

2nd Sunday of Lent
February 28, 2016

Genesis 15:5-12,17-18 + Psalm 27:1,7-8,8-9,13-14 + Philippians 3:17-4:1 + Luke 9:28B-36

Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk, was standing on a street corner in Louisville when a transfiguration hit him. The city seemed to glow. There is no way of telling people, he marveled, that they are walking around shining like the sun. There are no strangers. The gate of Heaven is everywhere. Sometimes when we least expect it, the eye of our soul is opened and we, too, see clearly the divine within and around us.

After all it wasn't Jesus who was transfigured on the mountaintop, but like Merton, it was the Apostles who were transfigured. For just a moment, they saw beyond the appearances to the reality. Beneath the surface of the everyday Jesus to the radiant glory shining forth from their friend and teacher – a glory always there but they had not seen before.

Transfiguration is not a spectacular special effect, but rather a shining glimpse of Heaven which comes to us when we are not looking for it. Transfiguration happens in the most ordinary of experiences when the extraordinary shines through for those given eyes to see. It comes when we are not looking for it, when the eye of our soul opens up to see there is something more.

Have you ever felt what Peter felt? "It is good for us to be here." Like when holding a sleeping baby, or being held by a loved one, enraptured by an Oklahoma sunset, or chasing down fly balls in the spring, swimming in the cool waters of a lake in the hot temps of August, or drinking in the brilliant colors of fall, or being transfixed by watching a single snowflake fall when time seems to stand still?

Transfiguration is the opening of our everyday mind to the Heaven that penetrates our Earth. Now you and I cannot make transfiguration happen. We can only be prepared to notice the glory when it comes to us through the most ordinary of people and in the most ordinary of places. After all Moses had tended his father-in-law's sheep on that Mount of Horub many days, passed by that bush many days, until one day he saw not just an ordinary bush but the flaming, fiery presence of the Divine and he took off his shoes in that presence.

The poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning says it this way: "Earth is crammed with Heaven, every common bush aflame with God. Those who notice take off their shoes while the rest sit around picking blackberries."

What happens when we experience these transfiguration moments is what happened to those first Apostles Peter, James, and John. They tried to freeze what they saw and in doing so, the vision disappeared as quickly as it appeared. Transfigurations are like that – fleeting experiences of glory which if we try to capture vanish from our vision. As soon as we try to capture a transfiguration moment, or make an idol of it, or take credit for it ourselves, a cloud of ego hides it. To have a transfiguration, to be open to the glory radiating all around us which we often do not see, is to not be interested in having one. To not be interested in having one.

Rather, to be prepared for such mountaintop moments, we simply place no other interest – no other interest – before our interest before in following Jesus, after all, He is the gateway to Heaven.

This is why the Father’s booming voice on that mountaintop speaks and says “Listen to Him”. Not “Look at Him in all of His glory”, but “Listen to Him”. When we follow the Lord of Glory, when we daily listen and learn from Him, we prepare the eye of our soul to see more clearly the glory of God’s love shining all around us, the glory of God’s presence enveloping us. And the way to open our lives more fully to such glory shining forth from God’s creation, comes by listening – listening – to the Lord of Glory.

The words Jesus speaks before He goes up the mountain are these: “I am going to suffer, and die, and rise on the third day.” Words that Peter and the others don’t want to hear. And then, “If you wish to come after me, deny yourself. Take up your cross and follow me.” Words that they turn a deaf ear to. To listen to the Lord of Glory means that we acknowledge that He has so much to teach us about the Divine Presence in our world. And we open ourselves more fully to this presence when we daily deny ourselves. In other words, die to self-centeredness, self-focus, and instead live our lives for others.

There is no other way than daily taking up our cross. In other words, the way of sacrificial love, by giving who we are and what we have in service of others for their good and lifting them up. There is no other way to this glory than following Him who is the Lord of Glory, which means listening to what He teaches us and making it part of our lives. When we do, this kind of listening transforms us because it helps us to see differently, to even see on the cross in the broken, tortured body of Jesus, the Glory of God shining forth.

The reason the command of the Father on that mountaintop is to listen to Him is because like those first Disciples, we don’t hear the last part of His suffering and death, you know, the part about rising on the third day. Oftentimes we are not fully attentive to that Good News that the Lord teaches us everyday that in the glorious light of the Resurrection, all of our struggles and sufferings and pain and dying take on a new significance, that the glory of the Lord’s Resurrection, which is also a concrete promise of our resurrection, sustains us during difficult, dark days. It is like a light that leads us and shows us the way because glory is what you are made for. Glory is what I am made for. Glory is what all of God’s creation is made for. That is the promise we are given.

To sustain that promise, we come to this mountaintop of the Holy Eucharist, and for just a moment, our eyes are open to see the Lord’s glory present here. Coming to us to feed us with the radiance of His love. Coming to us in the most ordinary of people who surround us with faith.

Fr. Joseph Jacobi