

## Homily - August 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Feast of the Transfiguration



The story of Jesus' transfiguration is a wonderful gospel story. It has just so much depth to it, so much symbolism. It speaks to me differently at different stages of my life. All Scripture stories are supposed to work that way, and this one certainly does.

I had the privilege of being on this mountain a few years ago. Peter, as you heard from the story, wanted to make three dwellings, to pitch three tents, in order to savor that wonderful moment. Jesus didn't think pitching tents, and savoring the moment, was the point of this experience on the mountaintop. I recall being there with the group I was with and winding our way slowly up to the top of this mountain. What I saw on the way up was both serious and comical at the same time. There were signs all along the way that said, "No Camping Allowed." People to this day still want to pitch tents as Peter wanted to do back then. I can't blame them.

I think Jesus wanted to accomplish two main things in the minds and hearts of Peter, James and John. With this short yet powerful glimpse of his glory, Jesus wanted to give these three guys both a sustaining glimpse and a missioning glimpse. Let me explain what I mean.

As you noticed from the story, Jesus didn't take all 12 Apostles to the top of Mount Tabor. He took only Peter, James and John. Why these three and not the others? Jump ahead, if you will, to Jesus' last night on earth before his crucifixion. He is in the Garden of Gethsemane undergoing his own agony, even to the point where we are told Jesus was sweating great drops of blood. That's pretty stressful; that's pretty intense. Peter, James, and John are witnesses to this stressful, low point in Jesus' life. There is nothing glorious about sweating blood. But before the Agony in the Garden takes place, Jesus already knew, ahead of time, that this will be too much for Peter, James and John to handle. He knows them better than they know themselves; he knows they will not be able to handle that much pain. So, to prepare

them in advance, he goes on a little hike with them up Mount Tabor and gives them a glimpse of his glory. What is the transfiguration? I believe it's a preview of the resurrection itself. It's a preview of where Jesus' life and all of our lives are ultimately going. It's all going towards the resurrection. Pain, suffering, and death are real. They're just not permanent; they're not final. Every one of us will have to go through our own Garden of Gethsemane, in one form or another. Every one of us will experience our own death. There's no avoiding suffering or death. By appearing in his glory, Jesus was telling Peter, James and John not to pitch tents, but to remember. Remember what you saw on this mountain. On your worst day, your worst week, your worst month, recall that mountaintop experience and allow it to sustain you. Trust that pain, suffering, and death will not have the final say about who you are. Healing, resurrection, and new life will be victorious even if it doesn't feel so in this very moment. We were never meant to be placed in the ground and become food for the worms. We were meant to share in the glory of Christ's resurrection. This glimpse of Jesus' glory is meant to sustain Peter, James, John, you and I for the struggles ahead.

The second purpose for Jesus' transfiguration, other than being a sustaining glimpse, is that Jesus wanted it to be a missioning glimpse as well. It will not only sustain you, but it will also propel you forward. Jesus is telling them that they can't pitch their tents there and savor the moment. It's not their little private or privileged "sound and light" show with Jesus. There is work to be done. There is a mission to be fulfilled. There is a kingdom to be proclaimed. Jesus does not want them to stay on the mountaintop but to go into the valley. Their lives, like yours and mine, will not be fulfillment contemplating the divine on a mountaintop. You and I have a mission, as those three guys did, to proclaim to people who are at the bottom what it was that was so wonderful about what we experience with glorified Lord at the top. Go and tell the depressed, the lonely, the unemployed, that their lives are more than the circumstances they find themselves in...much more.

The Transfiguration, and the missioning to go down the mountain into the valleys of peoples' lives, reminds me of the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. The more you say a prayer, the more you put on the mind of one who first constructed that prayer and who first prayed it themselves. The Our Father and the Prayer of St. Francis are the two hardest prayers for me to pray. If I was perfectly honest, I know I'm not living those prayers; I'm not there yet. But, that's OK. The more I pray the Our Father, the more I put on the mind of Christ. The more I put on the mind of Christ,

the better chance I have of living that prayer. So, I'm not a hypocrite; I'm just a slow learner.

The same goes with the Prayer of St. Francis. ***“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. When there is hatred let me sow love.”*** In other words, send me down into the valley where hatred still exists so that I may sow love, the love that I saw on the Mount of your Transfiguration. We may have to go through hatred, but love will win out in the end. ***“Lord, where there is injury, let me sow pardon.”*** In other words, as much as I would love to pitch a tent on this mountaintop, I know I have to go down into the valley of injury and bring your pardon there.” We may have to go through injury, but pardon, forgiveness will win out in the end. ***“Lord, where there is doubt, let me sow faith.”*** In other words, send me on a mission, Lord, down the mountain and into the valley. And where I see people struggling in their faith, let me sow faith in them. The prayer goes on, but I think you get the point.

At the end of each Mass we are being sent from the top of our own Mount Tabor. When the priest says, “The Mass is ended, go in peace,” he’s not just pointing us to the exit. Like Peter, James and John, we are being missioned to tell others the Good News of God’s love that we, ourselves, have experience, a love that is bringing everything and everyone to a new and resurrected life.

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