

Homily for Sunday, March 1, 2026

Once again, the opening line of the gospel is very telling and points us beyond the story itself. It starts off by telling us that Jesus led Peter, James and John up a mountain to be by themselves. You'll recall that this will be the same trio who, later on, will be with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before his



crucifixion. Peter, James and John, who witness his glory on the mountain peak, will soon afterwards observe his agony on the garden ground. To endure Gethsemane, the apostles will

have to be sustained by the glimpse of Jesus' glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. We also need those glimpses to sustain us in difficult times. Perhaps that's what Jesus was getting at when he said, "Walk while you still have the light" (Jn. 12: 35). If we remember what we saw, heard, and experienced in the light, it will serve us well, especially in times of darkness. What they saw on that mountain that day was nothing less than a glimpse of the future, a glimpse of Jesus' resurrected and glorified body. To put it succinctly, Jesus was transfigured but the Apostles were transformed. As such they could never forget what they experience for it had marked them for the rest of their lives. Peter, James, and John who came down the mountain were not the same trio who first ascended the mountain.

What happened to them, happens to us. First you see or hear something you weren't expecting to experience. Because of what you just experienced you feel differently inside. And because you feel differently inside, you respond differently. The experience makes a claim on you, in a good way, and you're never the same afterwards. Three transfiguration stories.

The late Steven Covey (author of the bestseller The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People) shared this story. It's about when he was riding the subway in New York City one Sunday afternoon. People were seated, minding their business. Some were reading the newspaper and others were dozing off. At one stop a man and his children entered the subway train not far from where he was seated. The children were yelling back and forth, throwing things, and even grabbing peoples' newspapers. It was all very disturbing, and yet the father of these children just sat there and did nothing. Steven couldn't believe the man could be so insensitive to let his children annoy so many passengers and do nothing about it. Finally, at the end of his patience, Steven turned to the man and said, "Sir, your children are really disturbing a lot of people. I wonder if you couldn't control them a little bit more?" The man lifted his gaze as if waking from a dream and said, "Oh, you're right. I guess I should do something about it. We just came from the hospital where their mother died about an hour ago. I don't know what to think and I guess they don't know how to handle it either." Steven says, "Can you imagine what I felt at that moment? Suddenly I saw things differently. Because I saw differently, I felt differently. And because I felt differently I behaved differently. My irritation vanished. I didn't have to worry about controlling my attitude or my behavior. My heart was filled with this man's pain. Feelings of compassion and

sympathy flowed freely. ‘Your wife just died? Oh, I’m so sorry! Can you tell me about it? What can I do to help?’”

Nothing changed on the subway car. All was the same: the same people, the same irritation, the same kids. What did change was a way of seeing it all and, with the seeing, a change in the way he felt, which led to a change in how he responded. It was Steven Covey’s moment of Transfiguration, a moment of revelation that sustained him in a difficult situation. The Steven Covey who entered the subway was not the same one who eventually exited the train. Jesus was transfigured; the apostles and Steven Covey were transformed.

Story number 2. It centers around a woman named Mary Ann Bird as she tells her story:

I grew up knowing that I was different, and I hated it. I was born with a cleft palate, and when I started school, my classmates made it clear to me how I must look to others: a little girl with a misshapen lip, crooked nose, lopsided teeth and garbled speech. When my classmates would ask, “What happened to your lip?” I’d tell them I’d fallen and cut it on a piece of glass. Somehow it seemed more acceptable to have suffered an accident than to have been born different. I was convinced that no one outside my family could love me.

There was, however, a teacher in the second grade who we all adored, Mrs. Leonard by name. She was short, round, happy—a sparkling lady. Annually, we would have a hearing test. I was virtually deaf in one of my ears; but when I had

taken the test in the past years, I discovered that if I did not press my hand as tightly upon my ears as I was instructed to do, I could pass the test. Mrs. Leonard gave the test to everyone in class, and finally it was my turn.

I knew from past years that as we stood against the door and covered one ear, the teacher sitting at her desk would whisper something and we would have to repeat it back...things like “the sky is blue” or “do you have new shoes?” I waited there for those words which changed my life. Mrs. Leonard said in her whisper, “I wish you were my little girl.”

Before Mrs. Leonard, she saw ugliness. After Mrs. Leonard, she saw beauty. Mrs. Leonard’s words remained a sustaining vision as this little girl hit the hard rocks of life.

Nothing on the outside changed, she was still the girl with the cleft palate. What did change was her way of seeing it all. Jesus was transfigured; the apostles and Mary Ann Bird were transformed.

Story number 3. It was a week before Christmas in 1993, and I was a seminarian on an internship year in Brockville, Ontario. For those without many means, it was a very humbling time as they were to line up in an orderly fashion outside in the cold, present the proper I.D., and receive whatever provisions the Salvation Army could give them. Usually, it was a food box with the basics. An older lady, with a disability knew that she couldn’t do this, yet still needed these necessities. I told her that I could stand in line in her place and bring back the groceries to her. She

told me that she would call the Salvation Army in advance to tell them that this was our plan. My strategy was to get in, get the box of groceries, get out and deliver them to her as fast as I could. It didn't work that way. I did take my place in line outside alright. But the line hardly moved at all. Whatever the delay, a half hour into it, I found myself still outside shivering among the needy. I saw poorly dressed and poorly groomed people coming out with groceries and used toys for the children. In the world of Santa Claus, who always give good and new gifts to all deserving children, I wondered how they would explain this to their children on Christmas morning. The more uncomfortable I felt, the slower the line seemed to move. I even felt guilty for wearing a new coat while everyone else wore used and soiled clothing. I didn't want anyone in the general public to see me in the line with the poor, but there I was looking at my watch wishing time would speed up, so that I could just get out of there. I was in line with what the Scriptures call the *anawim*, the poor, the humble, the meek, and the lowly. I made it back to the older lady who lived alone. She couldn't thank me enough. Nothing changed in her life. She was still poor, disabled and lonely. What did change was the way I saw the whole situation. For a half an hour I was this woman, and I was everyone who stood in the cold for a handout that day. Jesus was transfigured. The apostles and I were transformed.

~Fr. Phil