

ECHOING GOD'S WORD
in
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
Second Sunday of Lent
March 5, 2023

Lectionary Readings:

Genesis 12:1-4	God calls Abraham to make of him a blessing.
2 Timothy 1:8-10	God calls us in Christ to life everlasting.
Matthew 17:1-9	The light of divine life shines through Jesus.

Matthew:

Matthew situates the scene of Jesus' transfiguration as divine confirmation of Peter's proclamation of the divinity of Jesus. Immediately after the passage where Peter affirms that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God (Matthew 16: 13-20), and where Jesus has responded with the correction that it is in suffering and dying that he will be what Peter says he is (Matthew 16:21-28), we are given this anticipation of the resurrection, for comfort and reassurance to the disciples. Matthew knows that the Church needs to hear this also.

There are elements here that would remind anyone knowledgeable in the Hebrew Scriptures that we are dealing with a *theophany*, a self-revelation of God:

The mountain: Surely we are reminded of Sinai where God made himself known to Moses.

The radiance: A light shines wherever God is present (Exodus 25: 15; 40:34). A light shines from the face of Moses who has seen God (Exodus 34:35).

The cloud: God hovers over the tabernacle in the Tent of Reconciliation in the form of a cloud.

The voice from heaven: Beginning at Jesus' baptism, we hear that voice revealing his presence and his power (Matthew 3:17).

Listen to Him: In Wisdom literature there is always a call to *hear*, that is to *obey* God (Proverbs 5:7; Sirach 6:35; 21:15). Now the One to be obeyed is in Jesus of Nazareth.

Peter, who knows who Jesus is and still misinterprets the mission of Jesus, calls for structures that will render this manifestation permanent. He wants Three Booths to be set up. The Jewish Feast of Booths, Succoth, celebrated the days when the people lived as nomads on their way to the Promised Land, with God abiding among them in a special tent or booth (Deuteronomy 16: 13-15). Some had come to believe that the Messiah would manifest himself on the occasion of that feast. Peter may have thought that this was the time! He may have felt the time had come.

The Church stands in that radiance and shares in the glory that was manifested in Jesus on the mountain. With all of its lapses, stumbling, and mistakes, the Church wants to be assured that it is blessed by God, that it will be a blessing to the world, that its future is not in doubt as long as it abides in the bosom of Christ, the radiant Lord of heaven and earth. Our journey of faith is illuminated by the glory that comes from the Risen Christ. We are not in darkness. Evil has not taken over. There can be no doubt of the outcome. The Passion and death of Jesus must still be fulfilled in our lives and in the life of the Church, but resurrection and glory are assured. Sin is all around us and within us, but the glory of Christ has appeared and comes to be with us by the power of the Spirit. Evil has seen its days. Good will prevail from God everywhere.

Genesis:

Another strand from the five sources used to put together the first Five Books of the Bible comes to us today: the Yahwist's material, dating back to approximately the 10th century BCE. We see Abram (whose name later becomes Abraham) being called by God to go from among his people to a different land where he will be given a destiny as the father of all who believe. The name Abram means Great Father. His response of trusting faith in the God who called him has been hailed as the primary example of faith for many groups of believers. The Jewish, the Islamic, and the Christian traditions claim Abram as their common father since he was the first to believe. The journey we are on toward the heavenly land of promise has been walked before us by this person of faith. He is with us still as we leave our origins in sinful alienation and follow God toward a destiny of reconciliation and salvation.

Timothy:

Peter and Paul both died sometime during the middle 60s of the Common Era. Around the year 100 CE, a disciple of Paul needs to send pastoral advice to the leaders of the Church which is beset by major persecutions and internal difficulties. Living in a hostile pagan environment, the Church, which is growing rapidly, has to be reminded of its roots in the Passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, of its commitment to the faith, of the journey to salvation which can never be forgotten. The Church has been called by God, endowed with the unmerited gift of grace, and invited into a response of faithfulness. The journey is hard, but the rewards are great.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What comfort is there in the Transfiguration for people among us who are preparing for the Easter sacraments in the initiation process? What do the catechumens have to gain in becoming members of the Church of Jesus Christ through baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist? Do you see them as beneficiaries of the promise set before the world in this revelation of who Jesus is? What about those who are already baptized but who will be received into full communion at the Easter Vigil? What's in it for them?

2. What comfort is there for the Church, for your parish, for your family, or for your faith-sharing group in the revelation of the Transfiguration? Do we see ourselves as recipients of the promise that the glory of God would shine through us all? In what ways is that glory already present in the Church, in your life? Will we be able to live with more courage in the midst of our difficulties now that we have seen the promise?

3. List some of the ways in which the Church has been blessed by God so that it may be a source of blessing to the world. Have you seen the blessings that your parish has brought to the community in which it is located? Have you been part of that blessing? How has your family been a source of blessing for you? Do you consider yourself blessed by God so that you can be a blessing to others?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Take some time to reflect on how you, your family, your faith-sharing group can be more effective in communicating the blessings that you have received. Plan some small action by which the glory of the Risen Christ may be passed on to people who live in the darkness of loneliness, isolation, or pain.

PRAYER

**We come to you, Lord Jesus Christ.
Fill our hearts with your radiance
and make us children of light!**

(Song from ancient Christian Liturgies)

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

The very life of God has been born in us through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church speaks of sanctifying or deifying grace by which we become like God through an inner transformation that we call *justification*.

Major controversies have raged both inside and outside the Catholic Church concerning the nature of this *justification*. Catholic theologians have debated the processes by which grace makes us like God. Protestants have disagreed with us as to the nature and depth of this transformation. Do we really become like God in the very being of our souls?

The Day of the Transfiguration provides an opportunity for us to reflect on these questions. The disciples of Jesus were given a kind of preview of who he really was, of what would take place after his Passion and death, an anticipation of the resurrection. In the Scriptures, we have been given this scene so that we will know what the true destiny of the Church itself will be. Are we not called as the body of Christ to share in his life of resurrection? Is this only for the afterlife? Do we not even now, by the power of the Holy Spirit given us in baptism, share already in the transformation from sin to holiness?

The Catholic tradition holds that by grace, which is as an unmerited gift from God, we have received the very holiness that was in Christ Jesus. We have called that *sanctifying grace*. In Christ, this holiness exists from the fact that he is truly the second Person of the Holy Trinity. In us, this holiness exists as gift imparted by God through the Holy Spirit. Sanctifying grace makes us just before God; not just seen as just but truly transformed in the very depth of our being from sinfulness to holiness. We have become like God, a kind of deification, while remaining still capable of sin in our actions.

The person who has been gifted by God with the grace of justification stands before God in identification with Jesus Christ, sharing in the holiness of Christ, endowed with dignity as brother/sister of Jesus Christ. In the new birth of salvation, we have become a holy people, a people set apart for holy purposes, a 'nation of priests' empowered with Christ to offer acceptable sacrifices to the heavenly Father.

Our sins are not *just covered over by the merits of Christ* as some in the Reformation tradition believe. Our sins are truly forgiven, and God sees in us the face of the Risen Christ, radiant in the splendor of light that is image for godliness.

Now, Lutherans and Catholics have agreed on what we mean by *justification*. We arrived at what we found in Scripture through different ways. We believe the same things.

(See **The Catechism: # 1999**)

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