

SERMON- TRANSFIGURATION '17

Today we are celebrating the 2nd to last major feast of the Church year: The Transfiguration of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ.

This morning's Gospel reading describes the Transfiguration in this way:

Jesus takes 3 of his disciples (Peter, James and John) up a high mountain (Mt. Tabor), and he is transfigured before them—his face shines like the sun and his garments become white as light-----This light emanating from Jesus is the Divine, uncreated, light of God.

Now, it's likely that many of us associate the word "Transfiguration" with "change." And that is very appropriate, Because 'Transfiguration' literally means "a change of form." But we have to be careful how we interpret this.

Even though the Uncreated Light appeared through Jesus, This does not mean that He changed what he was by nature. It wasn't like Jesus flipped a switch and suddenly became divine. His Divinity was always there, the Disciples just didn't see it. Christ was simply revealing what he was all along...So, in a way, you could say that this feast is like another Epiphany--a manifestation of God.

In fact, the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) are clearly revealed here on Tabor just as they were at the time of Christ's baptism in the Jordan: We have the voice of the Father bearing witness to the Son, the appearance of the Holy Spirit (this time as a bright cloud--as opposed to a dove at Theophany) and of course the God man himself, Jesus Christ.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah also testifies to Christ's Divinity: They are there to show that Jesus is Lord and fulfillment of the law and the prophets as well as the God of both the living the dead (because Elijah ascended in a chariot to heaven) while Moses reposed before Israel reached the promise land).

So, the Transfiguration is first and foremost, a revelation of Christ's Divinity.

Secondly, the Transfiguration helps us to understand the purpose of Christ's Passion and Crucifixion.

You may recall that one chapter earlier in St. Matthew's Gospel, Jesus began to tell his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer at the hands of the elders and scribes and be killed.

Peter, (of course) is outraged by this and rebukes our Lord saying: "Far be it from you Lord, this shall not happen to you."

And Christ answers back with "Get behind me Satan!" and follows this with those famous words: "Whoever would come after me, let him deny himself and follow me."

How does this relate to the Transfiguration?

Jesus emphasizes the importance of suffering and cross-bearing before the Transfiguration **because** it is **through** his own suffering and death that he will enter into his glory (the glory revealed on Tabor). And through his passion, death, resurrection and ascension-- he allows us to share in that glory as well. What happened to the humanity of Christ can also happen to each and every one of us here today. In fact, Christ on the mount, transfigured, is an icon of what God intends for each of us. It is the way mankind was supposed to be from the beginning, the way we were before the fall ever happened.

What is required of us is that we follow his example. But how can we be transformed? How can we come to know this divine uncreated light that Christ is showing us? It isn't impossible for human beings. After all Moses' face shown with light after he talked with God on Mount Tabor and centuries later St. Seraphim of Sarov showed this same light filled countenance to those who came to talk with him. So how can this be accomplished?

First, We have to Pray. Not just when we come to church, but as much as possible. Throughout the course of our daily lives. Prayer can be transformative. The use of the "Jesus Prayer", for example,

has led many of the saints to experience the divine light of transformation --such as St. Simeon the New Theologian.

Second, we need to participate in the sacramental life of our Church. It has been said that “transfigured existence comes from Christ’s humanity, to us, THROUGH the sacraments.” Christ is with us in Baptism (and in the Eucharist), of which we are about to partake of this morning. Indeed, after we receive it, we sing the hymn: “We have seen the true LIGHT.” We have God dwelling in us.

As Fr. Antony Coniaris says:

“As we are incorporated into Christ through faith and the sacraments, we are gradually transformed into his likeness.” And we can become vehicles for the uncreated light. That is why Christ refers to his followers as the “light of the world.” It is our vocation to unite ourselves to Christ and share in his transfiguring light so that we can then share that same light with others in this fallen world. To bring light to the darkness.

That is why Peter, James and John were not allowed to stay on the mountain. They had a mission: to go let their light so shine before men, that others would see their good works and give glory to their Father who is in heaven.

This is our calling here at St. Ignatius. We are here to unite ourselves with Christ, and one another in such a way that we transform ourselves...moving from the image of God we are all made in, to His likeness.

I look forward to joining you on this journey of transfiguration and transformation as your new pastor. I look forward to being part of this work, which was begun by Fr. Gordon Walker and continued by Fr. Stephen. You have been served faithfully by two very good priests for many years. And I hope and pray that our time together will be as fruitful and beneficial not only to ourselves but to others and to the Glory of our Father who is in Heaven.

May God bless us as we continue on our path of transfiguration!
Happy Feast!