

The Transfiguration of the Lord (A)  
(Daniel 7:9-10,13-14 / Matthew 17:1-9)  
06.08.2014

Jesus invites you and me to come apart with Him today.  
He invites us to enter into the experience of the Transfiguration.  
He invites to enjoy what Peter, James and John were given to feel on the mountain top. There they contemplated Jesus bathed in light conversing with Moses and Elijah before their eyes.

Jesus wants us to know the warmth of heart accorded to those who are bathed with Him in God's own light.  
He wants us to be transfigured and transformed by this experience.

We read in the Book of the Beginnings, the Book of Genesis, that all began with the creation of light.  
*God said let there be light* and life came into being.  
God's spoken word gave light and with light came life.

This leads me to say that when we enter into the Transfiguration event what we are led to experience is nothing less than the re-creation of our whole being.

What the Lord wants to offer us today (and each and every day) is a fresh start with Christ.

Just as, in the Genesis story, we are told *the Spirit hovered over the deep*, so we are told that at the Transfiguration a bright cloud covered those on the Mountain top. This bright cloud represents the Spirit of God.  
*From the cloud there came a voice: God's own voice.*  
We are called to listen to that creative voice and its life-giving word.

We are invited this morning both to contemplate and to meditate: to look and to listen.  
*Behold!*  
*Listen!*

We could say that we are called to reflect, according to the double meaning of that word *reflect*.  
We reflect light (we pass it on) and we reflect upon (give thought to) words spoken or read.

It is in beholding and listening that we are given to understand the way to life Christ would have us take.

St Benedict in his Rule for Monks calls upon us to have great attention to the Lord at all times.  
He sees God speak in the ordinary, everyday circumstances of life, in prayer, in *lectio divina*, in the reality of the present moment, in every person who stands before us and deep down within our self.  
To recognise the Lord's presence in all things we must be attuned to the inner voice of love.  
*Listen.*  
*Behold.*  
*In His loving kindness the Lord shows us the path of life.*  
*Oh that today you would listen to His voice.*  
These are all words of counsel found in the Prologue of the Rule and taken up time and time again throughout the text.  
They are, of course, Scriptural words that Benedict has taken and made his own.

The way to life indicated to us here is a simple one, but we find it so hard to follow and hold to the

way of simplicity.  
So easily we become distracted.  
So readily we close our eyes.  
When we do so, we lose God from sight in our lives.

We are also inclined to stop our eyes, to become deafened and dull our hearts.  
How often we fail to listen!

As a result of our inattention we stumble and fall, we lose our way.

The Transfiguration event was a very special and graced moment which punctuated the disciples journey to Jerusalem with Jesus.  
It was a halt upon the way which was meant to help them take stock of where they were at on the journey they were pursuing.  
Its purpose was to help the disciples re-focus themselves.  
It was an experience given to them to prepare them for the end to which they were called with Jesus: the cross which was to lead to the resurrection.

We all need to avail of such graced moments on our earthly pilgrimage.  
We all need to continually re-evaluate our lives.  
We must take stock regularly to discern where we are at and where we are going.

We need to reflect upon our lives to discover their true meaning and their real end.

I understand today's gospel and this feast as an invitation to do just that.

The mystery of the transfiguration reminds us of all the ways God makes Himself known to us.

This gospel text speaks to us about seeing God and regarding our lives in His light.

It reminds us that we need quiet times away to take stock, to be renewed in spirit and to set goals.

There are critical questions we need to face up to regularly to keep ourselves focused.

We all need to ask ourselves questions along the following lines:

*Where do I see God's hand in my life?*

*What is He calling me to now?*

*What steps do I need to take to get there?*

*What do I need to let go off?*

*What do I need to prepare for?*

*What is the way the Lord would have me follow?*

*What is it that I will have to traverse along the way to arrive at the end to which I am called:  
fullness of life in God's presence, a share in Christ's own risen life?*

The truth is that these are questions we don't ask ourselves as much as we should.  
How often we simply allow ourselves to get carried along by life and sometimes just get carried away with ourselves.  
Without even realising it, the truth is that we can so easily lose our lives when we get carried away with ourselves.

We live in a world which is constantly bombarding us and we can get caught up in this bombarding mentality.

I am told that one has to *Tweet* several times a day to be relevant in today's world. This is not only according to other people's opinion: frequently it is to begin with the Tweeters' own opinion: *I must tweet in order to be seen to exist.*

How many people rate their worth by the number of their Tweets and Twitter account followers!

In Jesus' sight we are worth more than lots of birds with their twitters and tweets. He assures of this in chapter 6 of Matthew's gospel.

By our exaggerated preoccupation with our self-importance what we do is reduce ourselves to the level of worthless creatures

There are often nine as worthless as those who are forever striving to be relevant.

We can live so much of the time *on show* and in so doing deprive ourselves of the right and need we all have to reconnect with our inner self, to listen to the voice of God, the voice of love deep down within us.

In his famous *Proslogion* St Anselm talks of *going into one's inner chamber* (which while it may entail retreating into a physical space is really about entering into one's heart to begin with) *and there closing out so much that distracts us from God and our true self.*

Let's face it, when we live only on the surface of life (the surface of ourselves), often what appeals to us most is our selfish, sinful nature, our *super ego*. There is actually nothing *super* about our *super-ego*. In fact, it is really quite base.

Our *super ego* leads us to replace the Blessed Trinity with that little Trinity known to us under the appellations *I, me and myself.*

It makes us egoistic.

Its reinforced message to us is that we are all that matters.

It has us look at our relationships in life in a skewed way, asking ourselves these question: *What is in this for me? How can I use this contact? How can the person before me serve my interests?*

It has us do even some good things for the wrong reasons. Let's be honest enough to admit that we can do good things just so that our engagement in them can figure on our CV, or just so that we gain a reputation for ourselves as a *do-gooder*.

Is that to exercise genuine charity?

It isn't!

Let's be honest enough to admit to the fact that there can be/there is a certain ambiguity in all of us, even in our seemingly good actions.

When we get caught up in and carried away with ourselves, God's place in our life and the place of others who are (at least should be) significant to us gets lost sight of.

Moreover, when we take our decisions guided by egoism, this ends up limiting our horizons and our impact upon the world.

Thinking we are gaining the whole world, we lose ourselves and much else besides, family, friendships etc.

When we imagine the world revolves around us, our world becomes a very small place.

We may travel regularly from one country and even one continent to another, permanently globe-trotting, but actually not inhabiting this world at all, because we have no roots in us.

We can think we are expanding ourselves and yet not really be growing at all, because there is no depth to us.

What the disciples experienced with Jesus on the mountain of the Transfiguration is what we all need: solid grounding!

We need to halt and be grounded at regular intervals along the way so that we can hopefully start off afresh with Christ, actually aware of what direction our lives are meant to take.

Today's gospel is a very important text from this point of view.

It seems to me that for the disciples everything *came together* in that moment they spent with Jesus and with each other.

We all need such moments, and, by God's grace, we can experience them.

Let's just revive our memories a little.

I expect we have all known graced moments in hallowed spots with significant people.

At such times, in such places, with significant others, we will have tasted something wonderful, a truly awesome moment of grace and blessing.

What we will have experienced is that God was there, everything was bathed in His light and His love was quasi-tangible.

This will have filled us with what the Bible calls *Shalom*, a sense of fullness, of well-being, a plenitude of peace.

Such events and experiences are most often basically very simple, for their essence is pure love.

Maybe our transfiguration experience will be as simple as looking around us and seeing all our family there with us, happy to be gathered in one place to celebrate a landmark occasion.

Maybe it will be just a sense of satisfaction enjoyed at work from having accomplished a task and felt that we have done it well.

Perhaps it will be a walk hand-in-hand with a loved one, a special day spent in that significant other's company, a quiet evening meal shared with a spouse or a friend.

It could have been a halt along the roadside during a holiday period when we found ourselves completely bowled over by the wonderful landscape before our eyes and the enjoyment savoured in contemplating that beauty vista with someone special: a family member, a friend, the love of our life.

Our transfiguration experience may have been a moving liturgy, a time of prayer around a moment of passage in our own or another's life, an Easter Service or whatever.

In all the above moments we may well have thought to ourselves and maybe even expressed this thought audibly, just like the disciples did in today's gospel:

*Oh that this could last forever.*

*Let us build a tent to enshrine this moment.*

*Oh that time would grind to a halt that this might endure.*

But that is just not possible.

We simply cannot hinder life from going on and following its course.

As Christians we are people engaged on a journey.

Indeed, the first disciples were known as *People of the Way*.

The way we walk as Christians is also, we must remember, a way of the cross.

To hear that said, to cast this shadow, on this great feast of light, provides a necessary reality check for us.

Jesus' word stands forever: *Whoever would be a follower of mine, let him/her take up their cross and follow me.*

We must come down from the mountain.

There are things that beckon to us.

There is work to be done.

After the mountain-top experience the disciples were immediately thrown into life on the plain with Jesus.

Jesus had things to do and places to go.

His goal was Jerusalem where He would live His passion and death, along the way there was still much ministry to be accomplished.

Significantly, the painter Raphael included the crowd clamouring for Jesus' attention at the foot of the mountain in his depiction of the Transfiguration.

He included in the frame of his painting a distraught father who brought his child for healing.

I see today as a day in which to remember and give thanks to God for the very special moments we have all known along the way: the graced experiences that have punctuated our earthly pilgrimage, the times when we have been brought together with others by Jesus and felt His love and seen His presence in our midst.

The Lord gives us such moments to sustain us for the harsher times ahead.

They are *viaticum*: food for the journey.

Jesus gives us a foretaste of the light of His resurrection to prepare us for the pain and suffering of the cross.

His desire is to fill us with Easter hope to empower and strengthen us for the moments of passion we are all led to traverse inevitably .

The purpose of the grace of the vision of Jesus Transfigured was to help Peter, James and John (and us too) to live the painful moments when He and we are led to be disfigured, marked and marred by suffering and pain.

The Lord's desire and hope was that when the disciples would see Him lifted up upon the cross they would recall the grace of Mount Tabor. He longed for them to contemplate Him on the cross not as One torn apart, but One whose outstretched arms were open to embrace the whole world with an infinite breadth of His love.

May we see Jesus transfigured not only today, when He appears to us bathed in light, but also on those days when His disfigurement actually reveals to us as much as His beauty does, just how great His love for us is.

Amen!