

Transfiguration of the Lord (C)
(2 Peter 1:16-19 / Luke 9:28-36)
06.08.2019

While what happened on the Mountain of the Transfiguration was a once-off occurrence, it was also a revelatory event which, in God's design, was meant to have a lasting impact.

What happened on the Mountain of the Transfiguration points beyond itself; it points beyond that time and place to where we find ourselves today.

If this extraordinary phenomenon primarily touched Jesus and the three disciples who were given to witness it, in a certain sense, it is also one that is constantly relived in the life of the Church.

The Transfiguration is symbolic of something God's People are given to experience in every age and generation.

Like Peter, James and John, who were called aside by Jesus to live in His presence an extraordinary encounter with God on Mount Tabor in a privileged moment of grace, so it happens that time and again the Lord invites us to *come aside for a while* so that we too may experience, in a moment of prayerful communion with Him, a deeper insight in regard to His identity... and, by extension, into our own identity as well. The two go together: Christ's identity and ours! For, you see, we are all of us called to be *one with Christ*. Indeed, we are called to be so *one with Christ* as to be *another Christ*. The faith of the Church proclaims that every baptised person is actually an *alter Christus*. The words which the ancient baptismal liturgy had the assembled community call out to the newly baptised as they were presented to them on Easter night underline that here is our truest identity as Christians: *You are Christ!* We are Christ!

It happens that the Lord gives us to contemplate His Transfigured Face bathed in light at certain moments so as to strengthen and confirm our faith for other times in our lives when what we are given to see all around us is disfigured and the visages of the suffering people we encounter are, as it were, shrouded in darkness.

I have spoken of moments when we are led to share in the mystery of the Transfiguration.

Let's just consider our own faith journey for a moment, in a bid to bring such moments to mind.

I suspect we have all known blessed times of grace that are worth recalling.

Has it not been given to us at certain points along life's road to have been *surprised by grace*; to have experienced God's blessing, signs of His favour... in unexpected ways?

Often this will have happened at *off-guard moments* and in very unlikely circumstances.

Perhaps God blessed us through a graced encounter with another person in whom we were given a glimpse of God's love for us. Perhaps it was by participation in a special event of some sort – a liturgy which moved us deeply or a time of solitary prayer in which we were given to savour the peace of the Lord, who made Himself felt as intimately present to us, in a manner hitherto unknown. Perhaps it was simply by our contemplating the beauty of creation, being overcome with a sense of wonderment or awe at some great site or happening, that God's grace surprised us.

The Lord can use so many means to touch our hearts... and He does!

God our Father finds ways of helping us experience a special communion of love with Christ to the point where we feel caught up in His splendour.

I expect most of us would be shy about using the term *ecstasy*, but, in the graced moments I refer to, it can be something *ecstatic* that we are given to experience. Literally, a moment of ecstasy is a moment of heightened spiritual awareness in which we feel *at one with* the Lord whom we are given to contemplate in our prayer. On Tabor, the three disciples were caught up in an ecstatic experience in which they were led to enter into something of Jesus' own intimacy with the Father. There they heard the Father's voice as Christ Himself heard it. This voice invited the disciples to listen to Jesus, to place their trust in Him, to make Him the centre of their lives: to see *only Jesus* – as the gospel story itself indicates happened when it says that *they saw no one, but Jesus alone*.

Peter, James and John were given to experience on the mountain of the Transfiguration the truth of those words Paul wrote to the Colossians wherein he proclaimed: *There is only Christ. He is everything. He is in everything*.

On Mount Tabor, Peter, James and John were given to feel their own communion with Christ and His communion with them. They were given to realise that they were not only *alone* with Christ, but also *all one* with Him. What a sublime experience that was! It was a communion comparable to that most sublime encounter experienced between two people when they unite and become one in love.

Feeling *all one with Jesus* on the mountain, we can take it that the three disciples – Peter, James and John – were also led to feel *at one with each other*.

The disciples' communion with Christ – their sharing in His *being one with the Father* – would have led the chosen three to experience an extraordinary oneness with each other.

Through the experience of Tabor it is as if the prayer that Jesus prayed on the eve of His passion in John's gospel already finds fulfilment – even before it is pronounced. The unity for which Christ pleaded in regard to all His disciples was given as a foretaste to these chosen three. Tabor was a foretaste for Peter, James and John of what is yet to come for all of us *when God will be all in all*.

Is it not as if we can hear Christ's prayer in John 17 resonating in the quiet recesses of our hearts as we contemplate this gospel scene today? It seems to me as if the Father's response to Jesus' High Priestly Prayer is pre-empted for the chosen three: *Father, may they be one – as we are one... As You and I are one, may they be one... You with Me and I with You... May they be one with us... One in us*.

On Mount Tabor we are given a glimpse into what has been called *eschatological perfection*. It was for this reason St Thomas Aquinas considered the Transfiguration to be *the greatest miracle*. For Thomas *this miracle complemented baptism and showed the perfection of heaven*.

The Transfiguration is a pivotal moment, a turning point, in the Jesus story and in Christian revelation. Jesus is seen here to be the connecting point between heaven and earth.

It was precisely St Irenaeus' fascination with the mystery of the Transfiguration of Jesus that led him to proclaim: *The glory of God is a live human being and a truly human life is the vision of God*.

The experience of Peter, James and John on the Holy Mountain was surely not just their having witnessed Christ's Transfiguration as something that happened outside of themselves, a change wrought only in Jesus. It was also an inner experience which heralded a profound change within the three disciples who witnessed it.

On Tabor the disciples Peter, James and John were surely as much *configured* to the Resplendent Christ as they were given to see Him to be transfigured by the radiance of God's glory in which they contemplated Him to be clothed before their eyes.

All that to say that the mystery of the Transfiguration of Jesus should bring about within all of us a radical conversion: a real configuration to Christ!

Moreover, it should also lead us to recognise in every person we meet a reflection of the Transfigured Lord.

I believe that by our celebration of today's feast we are called upon to look at and see all our brothers and sisters in humanity in God's own light – even, and especially, those brothers and sisters who have been disfigured by the difficult and unfortunate experiences that life has thrown their way.

Just as Peter, James and John were led to realise on Mount Tabor that by frequenting Jesus they actually given to live in a mysterious closeness to God, so we are called to recognise this to be true when it comes to our relationships with other people.

God is mysteriously close to us in all those we meet at a deep heart to heart level.

What today's celebration reveals to us is that every human being is a beloved child of God, called to be robed in His own resplendent light.

The call for us is to see and honour every person we encounter as in some way reflecting to us something of God's own light. And to see ourselves as having the vocation to do the same.

If, for a moment on the hilltop, Peter, James and John came to appreciate that, in the poor and vulnerable Jesus, the light of the resurrection was already shining through, so we are invited to see and honour all our weak and suffering brothers and sisters as reflectors of God's own light for us today. We are also called to regard ourselves in that same light.

A true celebration of the Transfiguration requires of us that this mystery be seen to be made manifest in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Therefore, it demands of us that we let our masks fall so that others may catch a little glimpse of God in us and that we be attentive to those fleeting moments in which God reveals His divine face to us in the people we meet and with whom we are called to share the great gift of life.