

TRANSFIGURATION 2016
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
2 PETER 1.13 St. LUKE 9.28

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“We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father’s only Son”...the compelling closing words to the Last Gospel read at the conclusion of every Mass. Saint John alludes to what he saw himself and now shares with us.

The Transfiguration is one of the five milestones...important events...in the life of Jesus. The others are his Baptism, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension. None are stand-alone events...together they tell us who Jesus is...they are his life’s story.

After he was baptized and before he began his public ministry, Jesus went into the mountains to pray. Mountains are where people went to get close to God. They still do. Monasteries, convents and retreat centers are often located in mountains, far away from traffic jams and our busy and hectic lives. They give us an opportunity to refresh, renew and refocus our lives to better serve God and others.

The Transfiguration marks the end of Jesus’ public ministry. A short time earlier, Jesus asked Peter what the crowds were saying about him. Peter answered some thought he was John the Baptist or Elijah or some other prophet. Then Jesus asked Peter what he had to say about him. Peter answered he was God’s Messiah.

Peter did not understand the full meaning of what he has just said. He later criticized Jesus for talking about his suffering and death...and Jesus had to scold the impetuous Peter...for his failure to understand his true nature and his mission on earth. Not to accept the necessity of Jesus’ Passion is to side with the world and Satan. The Transfiguration confirms what Jesus had been saying all along...“This is why I came”...“Don’t try to hold on to me...Let me finish my work”.

When Jesus went up into the mountain he took Peter, James and John with him. They were his closest friends. The Synoptic Gospels tell us clouds appeared...a sign of God’s presence. Luke tells us Jesus’ whole appearance changed; his face was bright like the sun...his clothes “dazzling white”...like

Moses after his meeting with God. God’s glory means light...and lots of it!

Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus but do not talk directly to the disciples...instead they talk to Jesus about his impending suffering and death. Peter, James and John are eyewitnesses to a miracle happening to Jesus. It is for their benefit but they do not understand what is happening. Peter wants to hold onto the experience and suggests they set up camp. God has other plans.

Moses and Elijah are the cornerstones of old Israel...their appearance with Jesus at the Transfiguration teaches us that as good as the Ten Commandments and the prophetic writings are, Jesus is better, and their fulfillment and reconciliation to God comes through him and him alone. Peter, James and John hear God call Jesus his “only Son and to listen to him”.

The Transfiguration is the pivotal moment for all humankind, the point where human nature meets God...the place where earth meets heaven. Jesus is the permanent bridge between earth and heaven...better than the ladder in Jacob’s dream where he saw angels traveling between heaven and earth. Jesus is the one who makes God known to us through himself...so that we might one day see God in heaven...face-to-face...for ourselves...and we won’t have to turn away.

The Transfiguration of Jesus ultimately points to our own transfigurations and resurrections in glorious and perfect bodies in heaven. We can only imagine what it will be like to have perfect bodies. For now we experience the Transfiguration and Resurrection and a good dose of heaven-on-earth at every Mass...in Word and Sacrament. Every Mass is a pivotal moment in our lives when we declare what we believe to be true about Jesus.

When they left the mountain Jesus told his friends not to talk about what they had just seen...but they did anyway. We are told to talk...not to remain silent. We too have seen his glory...the bright white light of Jesus... Good News is to be shared!

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