

## FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION - B - 2006

*“Listen to Him!”*

St. Mark wrote his gospel story with us in mind. Even though he portrays the disciples of Jesus as slow learners (They just can't seem to figure out who Jesus is.), Mark wants to make sure his readers know. The very first verse of his gospel makes it clear that he is writing about *“Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”* Now, the Transfiguration story comes about half way through the gospel. It's like Mark interrupts his narrative to reassure the reader once again who this Jesus is. In the brilliance of light, Jesus is transformed into a divine figure before Peter, James and John. *“Aha, that's right. He's the Son of God.”* Our faith is reassured.

But as Jesus calls the apostles to faith, they, true to form, respond in fear and confusion. Peter doesn't get it. He wants to build three tents, as if this moment of glory were going to last. He's living in a dream world. To make sure this confusion does not extend to his readers, a voice speaks from the clouds saying, *“This is my beloved Son.”* It isn't the first time we've heard this voice, the first being at the River Jordan. Then, the *“beloved Son in whom he was well pleased”* was being baptized, and in so doing, Jesus identified himself with all sinners in the world. Now, he is seen in glory, radiantly transfigured in light. Could it be that the real Jesus is both so human as to be identified with all of humanity in its weakness and sin, and at the same time be truly divine? Could it be that Jesus who radiates the divine could be at the same time fully human? We're supposed to get this, even if the disciples can't.

The movie *“Entertaining Angels”* depicts the Catholic Worker founder, Dorothy Day, confronting a prostitute who has just stolen the rent money. Maggie, drunk and belligerent, attacks Dorothy with a cane. For a second, Dorothy's contorted face tells us that she is about to strike back. Then a transformation comes over her. *“I*

*can see light in you,” she assures Maggie. “You’re very beautiful.” Despite the fallen woman’s protests, Dorothy insists, “I love you Maggie. We all do.” This unexpected encounter enables Maggie to recognize herself as a cherished child of God.*

Could it be that we are both so human as to be identified with all of humanity in its weakness and sin, and at the same time share in the divine? Could it be that our natural instinct is to retaliate, to strike back when someone does us wrong, because we see only the human and are blinded to the divine? No wonder violence is escalating on our world. No wonder we live by rule of an eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-for-a-tooth rather than the rule of the gospel which calls us to look for a way to stop the cycle of violence. What would happen if we had the capacity to see the beauty of the divine in ourselves, one another, not to mention our enemies? What if we could say to those who hurt us, *“I love you. We all do.”* How would our lives be different? And they would be different.

However, notice that the voice from the clouds doesn’t tell Peter, James and John, or us, to look at Jesus. It instructs us to *“Listen to him!”* The moment of transfiguration is over. It’s like the voice is saying, *“Yes, remember what you saw, but listen to what Jesus has to say. In a short time you will look at him and be scandalized by his humanity. You will run and hide in fear. Remember that the one speaking to you is divine and shares in the glory of God. What you hear is coming from the Beloved Son. Listen to him!”*

Just for fun, I checked what Jesus said in the rest of this 9<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Mark’s Gospel that we need to listen to. *“Everything is possible for anyone who has faith.”* 9:24 Speaking of himself, Jesus says, *“The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men; they will put him to death.”* 9:31 And to his disciples, *“If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last and*

*servant of all.*” 9:35 Are we listening even today? “*Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me.*” 9:37 “*If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink just because you belong to Christ, then I tell you solemnly, he will most certainly not lose his reward.*” 9:41 “*If anyone give scandal to one of these little ones, it would be better he be thrown into the sea with a millstone around his neck.*” 9:42 Who wants to listen to things like that when we can just look at the divine Jesus in his beauty?

“*Listen to him!*” That’s what we have to do. After all, if we believe God became a human being to communicate to us, you’d think we’d be curious enough to wonder what he had to say. Sometimes I wonder if we are curious at all. A couple of weeks ago I referred to those who leave Mass early. Well, I think we may have a greater problem with people who come late. Some miss the Liturgy of the Word entirely. How can they listen when they’re not here? I could scold them for being late, but I don’t want to scold anybody. Besides, it doesn’t work more than a week or two at best. Why? Because the motive for being on time comes from the outside, and when the enforcer isn’t there, they don’t comply. It must come from their hearts. They need inner authority. If you have to be shamed into listening to the Word of God, you’ve got a bigger problem than being a poor listener.

It is St. John Vianney, the patron saint of parish priests, who helped me find a way to approach this problem without putting anyone down. He says, “*How often we come to church with no idea of what to do or what to ask for. And yet, whenever we go to another human being, we know well enough why we go.*” So let me suggest the following. Before you get here, ask yourself why you are coming. Where do you need God’s help in your life? Who needs your prayer? What should you thank God for? Do you need more strength to do God’s will in your life? Or do you need a greater

desire to do God's will in your life? Do you need to connect with people who share the gift of faith after a tough week in the world? Then there are issues like war, violence, hatred, injustice, bigotry, greed, sexual abuse, promiscuity, pornography, infidelity that need divine intervention if they are ever to be brought under control, let alone overcome. It seems that our world is out of control. What do we need to do so we are not a part of the problem?

Come to Mass with a purpose, and I assure you, you will be here on time. What we do this hour is too important to just show up, like we are doing God a favor by our presence. The point is, we may not be present at all. We're just here. I have less concern for people who miss Mass who really "miss" it than for people who are here and miss it at the same time.

We all need God's help. Don't lose heart. And be careful. If we want to throw stones at those who come late, they could throw stones at us for something else. We are really all in this together. May the Eucharist we celebrate now continue the transformation of our hearts.