

Sermon for the Solemnity of the Transfiguration
Sunday, August 6, 2023
“The Transfiguration is about seeing and listening”

Text: Exodus 34:29-35; 2 Peter 1:13-21; Luke 9:28-36

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we are celebrating the Solemnity of the Transfiguration of Our Lord. Transfiguration is a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state. At the Transfiguration, Jesus experienced a complete change of appearance into a more beautiful, divine state; what Peter, James, and John saw was a complete vision of Jesus in his resurrected fullness. That vision of Christ's transfiguration reinforced Jesus's true identity and showed them the glory of God, but it also prepared them for ministry with Jesus during his time with them and after his departure.

Just before the Transfiguration event, Jesus had fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. Immediately after the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” Some said John the Baptist, who had recently been beheaded by Herod, others said Elijah, still others said another of the great prophets. But Peter said, “You are the Messiah.” Peter recognized fully who Jesus was. Then he warned them that following him wouldn't be easy; it would mean taking up their cross and following him. If anyone wished to conform to the ways of the world to save their life, they would lose it; but, if they were willing to lose their life for his sake, they would save it. Then he told them that some would not taste death before they would see the kingdom of God. Jesus was preparing his disciples for a vision they could never have imagined. Eight days later, Peter, John, and James witnessed the Transfiguration.

When God reveals himself, things become brighter, things become clearer. Moses met God on Mt. Sinai. As we heard in the reading from Exodus, his face shone so brightly that he had to wear a veil, and in that encounter, understood better what he was to do for the Israelites, and he revealed to them more of God's commandments. At the transfiguration of Jesus Christ, God was revealing his future glory by whose Resurrection the greatest glorification of God would be declared: the redemption and salvation of all humanity. Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were discussing his departure; they were discussing his eventual Resurrection and Ascension. The disciples saw Jesus with pierced hands and feet. God revealed Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. Peter, James, and John were there to witness the Transfiguration, and they beheld Jesus in his resurrected glory flanked by Moses and Elijah. Take a look at our Transfiguration Window in the back of the church where you will see this story beautifully depicted.

But the Transfiguration event is as much an auditory wonder as it is a visual one. What the disciples heard is as important as what they saw, maybe even more so. A voice from heaven emerged from the cloud, declared that Jesus is the Son of God, and told

them to listen to him. Jesus had many things to teach them, to show them, and to reveal to them. His words give us the keys to a beautiful life here in our mortal lives and the assurance of eternal life thereafter. The Transfiguration was a theophany—a moment when humans experienced the fullness of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This was the same declaration that occurred at Jesus’s baptism, but of course, the disciples were not present then, because his baptism occurred just before Jesus called began his ministry and called his disciples. The Transfiguration connected Jesus’s baptism to his resurrection—two times when God revealed his Word to humankind as his presence among us to comfort us, guide us, and bring us salvation. We are told to listen to him.

At the 9:30 Mass, we will baptize a young girl, Violet Zoila Quintanilla-Gastón, and witness her adoption into the Christian family, the Body of Christ, the Church. The Paschal Candle stands behind the font to remind us that the Light of Christ illuminates the direct line from the waters of our baptism at the font to the saving grace we receive at the altar in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, we receive the real and true Presence of Jesus the Christ to help guide us throughout our lives. We will also renew the promises that we made at our own baptisms to follow the wisdom of Jesus Christ, to continue the fellowship and prayer of the apostles throughout our lives, to renounce Satan and resist evil, and when we sin, to repent and return to the Lord, to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ by word and example, to strive for justice and peace, and to respect the dignity of every human being.

Earlier this morning, I was watching the concluding Mass for World Youth Day, which has been taking place in Lisbon, Portugal. I’d like to share some of the points he made, with a few additions of my own. In his homily, Pope Francis told the thousands of young women and men assembled three takeaway points of the Transfiguration: to shine, to listen, and to be not afraid. Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a mountain where he shone before them and was declared as God’s light dwelling among them to prepare them for the darkness that they would have to endure in witnessing his Crucifixion and in carrying his message to the ends of the earth after his departure. We must take the burst of light of the Transfiguration to help us to face the challenges that we experience in each of our journeys. We do not radiate light when we put ourselves in that light and project ourselves. We must do away with self-centeredness, selfishness, making everything about the self and the individual. We radiate light when we welcome Jesus into our hearts, radiate his light through our acts of love, respect, caring, and prayer, and when we keep in mind that we live in a world of people just like us.

Secondly, we are to listen. A bright cloud overshadowed the disciples and from that, God declared his Son to the world. He told them to listen to what he said. This encapsulated the message of the entire gospel that we are to listen to the words of Jesus and live by them to be the people of God in the world. To be proclaimers that God is always with us throughout all of the challenges of life.

And finally, not to be afraid. In the story of the Transfiguration written in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, which is the gospel reading in the Roman lectionary for today, Jesus told his disciples to be not afraid. We hear this command frequently in the Gospels: “Do not be afraid.” We must have courage to face all that life has to offer us—the good and the bad—with the confidence that God’s brilliant light will illuminate our path and that the words of Jesus, God’s own Word made flesh, will guide us when we face every challenge we face in life. And we must have the courage to stand up and fight against the selfishness, injustice, disrespect, fear, violence, and turmoil that so profoundly afflict our nation and our world.

The Transfiguration is about seeing and the Transfiguration is about listening: having a glimpse of the divine in Jesus Christ who revealed for us the glory of God and hearing his instruction us to share his glory with others, live in love, and project the light of Christ that dwells within each and every one of us in his transfigured glory. And we must never lose confidence in God to help us show the world that humans can do better, be better, and live better. We can show the world how to be loving, respectful, and sincere examples of God’s image. And as the Transfiguration reminds us of our baptism, we’re supposed to be here for each other. We’re supposed to be our sisters’ and our brothers’ keeper. We are a family, we are the Body of Christ, and we must stick together, helping each other see God’s glory revealed in each other’s lives. Amen.

Resource

Cláudio Carvalhaes, “Commentary on Luke 9:28-36, (37-43)” in *The Working Preacher*,
http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2756.

<http://www.davidlose.net/2016/02/transfiguration-c-worship-transfigured/>

Homily of Pope Francis, preached at World Youth Day 2023 in Lisbon, Portugal, August 6, 2023.