

Homily for the Feast of the Transfiguration

August 5th and 6th 2023

An Hour of Glory on a windswept hill.

A pastor was meeting with a 90-year-old lady named Mrs. Sampson. Mrs. Sampson was frail, feeble, even sickly. The pastor said he was always inspired when he visited Mrs. Sampson. She had a radiant spirit that was contagious.

One day he asked this 90-year-old woman, "What is the secret of your attitude? What keeps you joyful, contented, and cheerful through your sickness?"

She answered with a line from a poem:

"I had an hour of glory on a windswept hill."

The pastor then observed "I knew she had been in touch with God and that was the whole reason for her cheerfulness."

Listen again to her words: "an hour of glory on a windswept hill." Sometimes we refer to special events in our life as "a mountaintop experience." Many of us have had such experiences, a time when God seemed very close. It may have been on an actual mountain. It may have been by a seaside. Dare I say it? It may even have happened at Mass.

I remember a few years ago hiking to the top of Prairie Mountain which you access down highway 66. It was September, a day that was cool and overcast. It was an arduous climb, and when I arrived at the top the wind was blowing fiercely. But there was also a beauty as the afternoon autumnal light captured the glory of the mountains. Living as we do near the mountains, means that many of us here might have stories like mine.

St Peter in the reading from his second letter shares with us the hour of glory he experienced with James and John on that windswept hill, called Mount Tabor. Six days earlier he had professed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God and then reviled Jesus when the Lord began to talk about the Way of the Cross. Jesus then said there are some standing "here with him who would not taste death until they saw Jesus coming in his kingdom".

This is what happened to Peter the two brothers six days later. As they climbed Mount Tabor Peter's imagination was pondering all Jesus had discussed with them. How do we make sense of all the Lord is saying and all we are experiencing? Then as they are on top of the Mountain, the glory mentioned six days earlier is now manifested. Jesus is radiant in his heavenly splendour and Peter says we experienced this hour of glory on a windswept hill, this way:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty.¹

The word “myth,” found elsewhere in the New Testament only in the Pastoral Letters (1 Tim 1:4; 4:7; 2 Tim 4:4; Titus 1:14), indicates in this context an unreal, fabricated story about the gods or divine activity². These kinds of myths were very common among ancient peoples and Peter knew all about them. “No”, says, Peter, what I am relating to you happened in time, we were eyewitnesses to his majesty. When Peter says majesty, he means Jesus’ divinity. This is how St Matthew describes this event:

² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white³.

Peter says that this is the hour of glory we experienced on a particular day and time on that windswept hill. It is this Jesus we will encounter when the short hour of our earthly life is over, and we enter the greater heavenly glory. Peter goes onto say not only did we see his majesty we heard the voice of the Holy One.

¹⁷ For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.⁴

They both saw and heard this heavenly manifestation and thereby Peter is emphatically stating the Transfiguration really happened. It was an historical event.

Peter can then apply what these means for our lives:

So, we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed.

What does St Peter mean by the prophetic message being confirmed? The words the Father speaks to Jesus – “this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased” are a compilation from Psalm 2 that speaks of the Messiah of the Lord and Isaiah 42 that speaks of the Suffering Servant of the Lord. Peter is stating that in the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ this prophetic message anticipated in these Old Testament books has now been confirmed. Jesus is the Messiah of Psalm 2 and the Servant of Isaiah.

¹ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition](#) (2 Pe 1:16). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

² Keating, D. (2011). [First and Second Peter, Jude](#) (p. 151). Baker Academic.

³ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition](#) (Mt 17:2). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition](#) (2 Pe 1:17–18). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

Because the Transfiguration confirms Jesus is the Messiah who is the suffering servant he concludes:

You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.⁵

This is a beautiful image. Jesus' transfiguration wasn't meant just for Peter, James and John. It is meant for us as well. It is the lamp shining in the dark place that is this world. But the day will come when the morning star rises in our hearts. Have you ever noticed the brightness of Venus, especially in the winter night sky? It stands out as the brightest of the stars. Venus is the morning star.

When will the morning star rise in our hearts? Ultimately at the time of the Second Coming. In Revelation 22 Jesus calls himself the bright "Morning Star". It is the ultimate description he uses of himself in the Bible. This is why St Peter uses this image of the Morning Star. It came from Jesus.

The first meaning of this verse is one where we keep looking to Jesus in this dark place as we hopefully look forward to that day when he will come again, and the morning star will be fully experienced by us in the New Heaven and Earth where all will be transfigured.

But does this verse have a more immediate application? Indeed, it does. In this world something happens in our hearts when we realize the life of Jesus and the witness of the Church is not a made-up story, a myth. No, it is true and when we accept this we are grateful it gives perspective and orientation to our lives. We can live in such a way that in listening to Jesus we are sharing in the story of God's people in a very special way.

We are invited to realize that at every Mass we experience an hour of glory on the windswept hill. Remember Peter, James, and John both heard the voice of God and saw his glory. This is what happens at every Mass. The word of God allows us to listen to Jesus so in turn we receive him in His Eucharist where the glory is real, though more hidden. As Jesus is elevated in the Eucharist, we do indeed see Jesus alone. Then we are invited to receive his glorious life into our life, trusting that one day we will share fully in his glory. Mass can therefore be a time where the morning star does rise in our hearts and we are then invited to go out into the world, that is to come down from the Mountain.

For you see Mass is to then equip us to live down in the valley. But like Peter, we can want to build tabernacles on the Mountain. I appreciate how St Augustine reflected on Peter and perhaps our desire for the hour of glory to be prolonged. But says Augustine, quoting the Bible: "it is through many trials that we enter the Kingdom of God" He then writes:

Peter did not yet understand this when he wanted to remain with Christ on the mountain. It has been reserved for you, Peter, but for after death. For now, Jesus says: "Go down to toil on earth, to serve on earth, to be scorned and crucified on earth. Life goes down to be killed; Bread goes down to suffer

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#) (2 Pe 1:19). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

hunger; the Way goes down to be exhausted on his journey; the Spring goes down to suffer thirst; and you refuse to suffer?”⁶

The Transfiguration of the Mass emboldens and encourages us to live in this dark world so that like Mrs. Sampson we pray to reflect Jesus’ life in our lives because we have had “an hour of glory on this windswept hill”.

⁶ Catholic Church. (2000). [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) (2nd Ed., p. 143). United States Catholic Conference.