

Man Fully Alive Fr Jonathan Gibson
Homily for Lent 2 February 20/21-2016
Genesis 15:5–12, 17–18 Psalm 27:1, 7–9, 13–14
Philippians 3:17–4:1 Luke 9:28b–36

One of my favorite quotes is the famous line from Saint Irenaeus:

The glory of God is man fully alive.

Saint Irenaeus lived in the second century and this quote is rightly celebrated as one of the most profound incites into theological anthropology – a hundred dollar term for the theology of human nature.

God receives external glory when humans are truly alive.

St Irenaeus goes on to say:

“the life of a man is the vision of God.”

Now think about this with me as we consider the Gospel reading for today. Here is Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, joined by Moses and Elijah. Why these two men? Moses, the giver of God's law, and the great prophet Elijah, were the only Old Testament figures to hear the voice and see the glory of God atop a mountain. While there on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus brings with him the Apostolic trio of Peter, James and John. We are invited today to share in this vision of Jesus transfigured and glorified. For when we see him more clearly we will understand ourselves aright and say with St. Irenaeus.

Amen, the glory of God is man fully alive.

Now in order for us to see the vision of God so as to understand what it means to be human it is important for us to be mindful of three things.

1. We need to know where we are.
2. We need to know whose we are
3. We need to know the goal and destiny of our lives.

1. We need to know where we are:

By this I mean we need to know our present location. What does it mean for us to be Christians living in the world? Here is what today's readings tell us. It is hard for us to stay focused on Jesus. I love how this is expressed in the Gospel reading:

Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him

At two key moments the Apostolic trio is the sleepy trio. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the same three and getting some zzzs while Jesus cries out to the Father.

If it is possible take this cup from me. Yet, not my will but yours be done.

Here the same thing is happening. However they don't lose complete consciousness and see the Lord's glory.

So here is the thing we need to remember about our current address. In a world like this it is so easy for us to become spiritually sleepy. We are so easily lulled into a semi-consciousness where we are not fully alive because we are not fully a-tuned to the vision of Jesus.

One of the best literary examples of how we can be weighed down with sleep is illustrated in C.S. Lewis Narnia Chronicles book "The Silver Chair". In this story the protagonists are on a rescue mission. Two children, Jill and Eustace, and one Marsh Wiggle, Puddleglum, have left the overland world of Narnia for the underworld ruled by a Queen known as the Lady of the Green Kirtle. This trio is on a mission to rescue Prince Rillian, the rightful heir of Narnia, from the Queen's clutches. Just as the rescue mission is almost completed, the Queen catches the rescuing band and casts an enchantment spell on them. They become Oh so sleepy and come to believe that the only world that exists is this underworld, ruled by the Lady of the Green Kirtle. Just as the Queen has them almost lose consciousness of any world but hers, Puddleglum is aroused from his droopy state and proclaims:

One word, Ma'am, One word... Suppose we have only dreamed, or made up, all those things-trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself. Suppose we have. Then all I can say is that, in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones. Suppose this black pit of a kingdom of yours is the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor one. And that's a funny thing, when you come to think of it. We're just babies making up a game, if you're right. But four babies playing a game can make a play-world which licks your real world hollow. That's why I'm going to stand by the play world. I'm on Aslan's side even if there isn't any Aslan to lead it. I'm going to live as like a Narnian as I can even if there isn't any Narnia.

Puddleglum knew that an enchantment was at work wanting to lull him to sleep and forgetfulness of any world other than the world in which he found himself. Like him and like Peter we need to hear the words, wake up! The Glory of God is man full alive, even in a world of such forgetfulness as this one.

2. We need to know whose we are.

Not only do we need to know where we are, we need to know whose we are. At the end of the Gospel reading Moses and Elijah have exited the scene and Peter, James and John are left alone with Jesus. At this moment, the same words spoken to Jesus at his baptism are now spoken to the Apostolic trio.

"This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!".

When we know we belong to Jesus Christ and that our lives find orientation and direction as we listen to him then with St. Paul we can say:

join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us

When we know we belong to Jesus Christ then we also realize that our lives are to be lived in such a way that people see Jesus in us. Remember the life of man is the vision of God? How true this is when it comes to the example you set for your children. Parents how you live will be reflected in your children. For they imitate you for good and for ill. As you know whose you are, so to your children will know whose they are. And together seeing Jesus you will be able to say Amen, the Glory of God is Man fully Alive.

3. *We need to know the goal and destiny of our lives.*

Knowing where we are and whose we are will help us daily keep before us the goal and destiny of our lives. Such a goal and destiny is stated by St. Paul wonderfully.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

Isn't that an amazing statement of our goal and destiny? One day these bodies of humiliation will be transfigured just like our Lord was on the Mount of Transfiguration and after his Resurrection. One day these bodies will be like our Blessed Mother's, where we will be glorified. One day all things will be subjected to Jesus Christ and as Paul says in chapter two of this great Epistle to the Philippians:

At the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And so knowing where we are, whose we are and the goal and destiny of our lives we affirm that our citizenship is not really Canadian but heavenly.

People with such a passport know that this world is fleeting and passing. People with such passport know that one day when we see the beatific vision we will be like Jesus for we will see him as he is. People with such a passport can live purposefully in the present because with St. Irenaeus they sing their national anthem:

The Glory of God is man fully alive.