

***The Mass on the Mountain***

Homily for March 16-17<sup>th</sup> 2019

Today's Gospel presents us with a story that is in many ways beyond our own spiritual experiences. For Peter, James and John to have experienced the Transfigured Christ was an event unique to those three. And yet, it is worth remembering that St. Peter in his second Epistle speaks about the importance of the Transfiguration for those, who like us, were not there. After describing their experience of the Transfiguration Peter goes on to encourage his readers with these words:

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

We are to pay attention to is the Transfiguration, which he describes as a lamp shining in a dark place. The dark place is of course, this world, where the light of Christ's transfigured presence shines like that of a lamp. It is not an all-encompassing light, but it does stand out against the backdrop of a dark world. Peter says the light emanating from the Transfiguration is enough light to see us through this present life until the day dawns when the light of Christ will cover the face of the earth in the event of his Second Coming.

How do we pay attention to this lamp shining in a dark place? As I pondered this question, I saw how the Mass is the premier way whereby we can pay attention to this lamp shining in a dark place. Let me put this differently. The Mass is the place where we can in the present connect with the experience of Peter, James and John, as they were with Christ on the Mount Tabor.

I would therefore like to go through the passage with you now and show you the parallels the Mass.

***Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>1</sup>***

Notice that reference is made to "after these sayings". What had occurred about 8 days earlier was Simon's declaration that Jesus is the Christ; Jesus' declaring Simon is the Rock on which he will build his church; the first prediction of the Lord's passion; Peter's rebuttal of Jesus for talking like this and Jesus then rebuking Peter because he is thinking of Jesus from a worldly perspective.

Here is the point I want to make. We come to Mass arrive with faith in Jesus and a trust in the Church as being his body on earth. Yet we come as very genuine and fallible human beings

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Lk 9:28). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

whose lives are marked by times of great conviction and confidence in Christ and at other times our faith wavers and we are confused.

Notice Jesus led them up a high Mountain for a time apart. Now you are no doubt aware that in the Bible to go up a Mountain is to draw closer to God. It is a place where perspective is gained because the valley below is laid out clearly. In biblical terms these places of encounter are times where enlightenment is gained and we see more of who God is and of who we are. Now think about this in relation to the Mass. We have come apart, so that we have the opportunity to draw closer to God. It is a time at the beginning of the week where we are invited to gain perspective so that we can place the rest of our week in the context of what happens here. Jesus leads us here so that we may see more of Him. For in seeing Him clearly we can then better see and understand our lives lived in the dark place of this world.

*And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white<sup>2</sup>.*

In other words Jesus was transfigured. This word in Greek is the root of the English word “metamorphosis”. Now think about what happens with a tadpole when the metamorphosis happens and it becomes a frog. The lower form is elevated into the higher form. Think as well of what occurs with the caterpillar. It takes its caterpillar state and incorporates this into its new life as a butterfly; or the seed elevated into the plant; or the square raised to cube; or the triangle raised to a pyramid. In each case there is an intensification as the lower is incorporated into the higher state. This is how we are to view the Transfiguration of Jesus. The form of Jesus is not left behind it is changed into a higher key.

Now think about this in relation to the Eucharist. It is this same metamorphosis that happens as bread and wine are taken, consecrated and then raised into the body and blood, soul and divinity of Christ. The lower is elevated into the higher and we have a way in the present to encounter Christ under the sacramental species of bread and wine and so enter into His transformative life.

*Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him.*

Moses and Elijah are two of the great men of the Old Testament and they represent the twofold division of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Law and the Prophets. As we think about the Mass we read from the whole of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. This is because the Bible is to be read not only as a unity but also as a collection of books that is always pointing to Jesus Christ. He is the theme and central character of both Testaments and at every Sunday Mass we are reminded of this through the appointed readings.

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<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Lk 9:29). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

***Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he***

Booths, dwellings or tabernacles. Consider how no tabernacle was needed for Moses or Elijah but here at St. Peter’s and in every Catholic Church around the world a booth or tabernacle is present to house the Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

***Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”***<sup>3</sup>

Twice in the Gospels we read this word from the Father. The first is at the time of the Baptism of Jesus and the other time is in this verse. At the heart of the Eucharist Celebration is listening to his voice through the reading of Scripture and homily and beholding him in the Eucharist.

This brings us to the high point of the Mass. At the end of this story they see only Jesus. In Matthew’s account we have this detail added:

***When the disciples heard the voice, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. 7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” 8 And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.***

Think about this now in relation to the Mass. Where is everything moving through the Liturgy? It is to that point where after the words of Consecration Jesus is sacramentally present and the priest elevates the host and the precious blood to the threefold ringing of the bells. When we get to this moment we are seeing only Jesus, a theme reiterated when the priest says moments later:

***Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the Sin of the World.***

At this moment, like Peter, James and John we see only Jesus and then come forward to receive him into our own lives. And here is the most beautiful thing. The tabernacle to be prepared was not on the Mount of Transfiguration, no it is within the inner sanctum of our own hearts.

For He who dwells on the Tabernacle of the Altar is to also dwell within our own hearts. This is so we can be transfigured and to quote Paul in today’s Epistle:

***He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory,***<sup>4</sup>

That Day when the lower is transposed into the higher, the square becomes cube, the caterpillar the butterfly, the mortal man becomes the immortal man.

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<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Lk 9:35). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>4</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Php 3:21). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

The Mass is the time and place where the lamp of the Transfigured presence of Christ is shining in the dark place of this world. I hope that from today's homily you will see ever more clearly the gift the Eucharist, the Mass is for us and how our participation in it brings us every Sunday to the Mount of Transfiguration.