

The Destiny: Transfiguration

Homily for August 5-6th 2017

We live in a culture where a high value is placed on appearance. For instance men my age, whose hair line has not receded to baldness, as in my case, can spend money on hair products that claim to restore the health of hair follicles and so enable that youthful appearance to be restored to aging men.

The Gospel for today tells us of another kind of emphasis on appearance. Here we are told that Jesus takes Peter James and John up a high mountain and his appearance is changed. He is transfigured before them, so that they see his divine nature in a way they had never before recognized.

Today's Feast is a wonderful gift because it helps us in a special way to look forward to heaven. St John in his first Epistle says "When Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is". The Transfiguration is therefore important in our lives because it helps us to realize two things. First it affirms the divinity of Christ and secondly it anticipates our own divinization. Our Destiny is to one day be transfigured.

In the Old Testament reading from Daniel a window is opened into heaven. Here we see described the Ancient of Days, God the Father", impart to the Son of Man, God the Son, universal dominion. Remember repeatedly in the Gospels Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man? By so doing he was referring to Daniel chapter 7 where we read:

***As I watched in the night visions,
I saw one like a Son of Man
coming with the clouds of heaven.
And he came to the Ancient One
and was presented before him.
14 To him was given dominion
and glory and kingship,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
that shall not pass away,
and his kingship is one
that shall never be destroyed.***

Here we read of Jesus' divinity in relation to his eternal kingdom that will never be destroyed. A kingdom anticipated now that will be fully realized when we enter into the heavenly dimension. For now this kingdom can never be separated from the way of the Cross. This is why the story of the Transfiguration is told in Matthew, Mark and Luke in conjunction with the Lord's impending suffering. Jesus had exhorted the Apostles to follow him on the way of the Cross and of sacrifice. A few days later, at Mount Tabor, He wants to strengthen their faith.

We know that for someone to advance directly along a particular path, it is important to know the destination beforehand, just as the archer does not accurately launch an arrow without first looking at the target. This is necessary, above all, when the road is rough and hazardous, and the path laborious. It is fitting, therefore, for Christ to reveal to his disciples the splendour of his glory, to become transfigured before them, since in the same glory he will one day transfigure us.

The Lord wants to strengthen us with the hope of heaven too, especially if at some point the way becomes taxing, and discouragement causes us to falter. Thinking about the life of heaven will help us be strong and to persevere. May we not fail to keep before our eyes the final destination prepared for us by our Father God. Each day that passes draws us a little closer to it. For a Christian, the passing of time is in no way a tragedy. On the contrary, it shortens the distance we need to travel before our long-awaited and definitive meeting with God when we will share in this glory!

St Peter in today's Epistle gives us clear direction as to how we can keep our eyes on the final destination. He reminds us that the Transfiguration of Jesus affirms that Christianity is an historical faith, an intelligent faith and is an orientating faith.

First Christianity says St. Peter is historical:

16 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.

Notice that Peter refers to two of our senses in these verses: He says they had been eyewitnesses of Jesus' majesty and they heard the voice of the Father, for he goes on to write:

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."

Clearly Peter is challenging those who accused him of myth telling. The word "myth" suggests in this context an unreal, fabricated story about the gods or divine activity. No says Peter we witnessed his glory by what we saw and heard therefore affirming the historicity of this event.

Peter also reminds us that Christianity is intelligent because it fully engages the intellect.

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed.

What prophetic message is he referring to? Remember on Mount Tabor that Moses, the Law Giver and Elijah, the first of the Prophets appeared with Jesus talking about his exit. The prophets were always to interpret and apply the Law that had been given to Moses. Now says Peter the fullness of this Old Testament Witness comes together in Jesus. Notice that in the Gospel we are told that Moses and Elijah withdraw and in the end the three apostle see Jesus alone.

To fully embrace Christianity involves an understanding of the sweep of biblical theology. The more fully we understand the Faith the more vital our relationship with Jesus will become because we understand how the fullness of the biblical witness culminates in Him.

Which leads to the third and final point: Not only is Christianity historical and intellectual it is also orientating. It is like a compass that helps to locate us in the present as we are on the roadway to heaven.

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.

The prophetic message of Scripture will serve as a lamp until “the day dawns”. This first of all implies that we are living in a world that is characterized by darkness where many people don’t have the light to direct their lives. Peter anticipates the day when the lamp will no longer be needed as he looks forward to the coming of the Lord himself and the dawn of the new age. The image of the “morning star” can be applied in two ways. First, the rising of the actual morning star, that is, the planet Venus, announces that day is at hand. This is entirely appropriate as an image of Christ’s return heralding the new age. Second, “the morning star” is also an indirect reference to Num 24:17. Let me read numbers 24:17:

***a star shall come forth out of Jacob,
and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;***

The promise that “a star will rise from Jacob” refers specifically to the promised king, the Messiah, who will come and redeem his people. In the last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22:16 we read the last description of Jesus given to us in the Bible. It is from the Lord’s own mouth:

“I Jesus am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.”

Those who live attentive to the faith in its historical and intellectual dimensions will in turn be so orientated in this life that when the morning star finally dawns in our own hearts all that we have hopefully believed in this life will be realized and we will be like Jesus because we will see him as he really is.

The Feast of the Transfiguration reminds us that the change in appearance that is of utmost importance results in our being conformed in appearance to Jesus Christ. This happens when we remember this Feast is historical and so orientates and shapes our intellect as we listen to Jesus.

While the work of transformation is ongoing in our present life, it will not be until the next life that it will be complete where our destiny will be transfiguration. This is good news for people like me whose hair follicles are beyond repair, but whose souls are continually being renewed.