

Sunday, August 8, 2021

“God from God light from Light.” We say that together almost every week in the lines of the Nicene Creed. That is a lot of what today is about. Today we observe the Feast of the Transfiguration. It is a New Testament event remembered and celebrated twice in the normal run of the Church’s calendar. Today, because it is the Sunday after the Feast day, August 6, and earlier this year, on the last Sunday of the Season of Epiphany. When we hear this lesson in Epiphany it is in a really different context. It ends a season that is all about light. Epiphany begins with the lighting of bonfires and the visitation of the Magi following a Star from the East. And ends when Jesus’ Disciples see him “unveiled” transfigured on today’s mountaintop.

Make no mistake this is a strange story. It tells us that Jesus’ garments became so white the disciples could barely look at him. Like Moses at Sinai his very skin shone from being in the presence of God. The Hebrew word for that shining face is Shekenah, and it prefigures all our later ideas about halos and auras and the like. Two great patriarchs appear beside him, Moses the Father of the Law and Elijah the Father of the Prophets. These three stand and speak together while the disciples, Peter James and John stare on in awe and disbelief. Who is this teacher, our friend, that the winds and sea obey him and prophets stand with him? Who indeed?

And then a voice from Heaven comes booming from the clouds like a clap of thunder. Like a noise that wakes you from sound sleep, and waking you can almost not remember hearing it at all. But this voice said, “This is my Son my Chosen, Listen to him.” So, in retrospect, the voice didn’t really change anything about Jesus. It merely identified him. The light didn’t really change his complexion or his clothes, it just lit them up. The whole spectacular thing there on the mountaintop, didn’t change a single thing about Jesus. We do not call this the Feast of the Transformation because nothing was really changed there. We call it Transfiguration, because in

this great light the disciples come to see Jesus for who he truly is, for who he has always been. And in that light, eventually they come to see everything differently. So I suggest to you today that for all the shock and awe, for all the “sturm und drang” of that Holy Mountain, the only three people who actually get changed there are the witnesses John, James, and Peter.

Now, my experience with stories of this sort is that when scripture shows me a change taking place in the disciples, who symbolize the church and therefore us, then that lesson is actually attesting to changes that take place in you and me. Now, that puts some meat in the story. There is something we can wrestle with. What is it that changes. These three disciples already know that Jesus is a great teacher. They have heard and even suspected that he is especially related to God. They have seen some of the miracles and healings and heard some sermons and parables by this time that tell them this is no run-of-the-mill preacher they follow. But to see him there, framed by Moses and Elijah, standing in dazzling light while a voice identifies him as “the one.” That’s a whole different thing.

Let’s just assume that the story is true and it happened just as it is here described. There are two ways it could change us:

On the one hand it could make us so sure that our Jesus is the absolute only bearer of truth from God that we feel good about impeaching the faith of others, even the faith of other Christians who don’t see things our way. We could become smug and overconfident in our relationship with God. We could figure that whatever our little religion does is right and everybody else is wrong. Oddly, that sounds like a misuse of light to me.

On the other hand, seeing Jesus in this new light could strengthen our faith in his message of peace, mercy, and inclusion. It could make us so sure in our own faith that we are happy to welcome the faith of others unlike us. Out of this glaring light we could come to see Jesus as

speaking from the older Hebrew faith and its practice and values. If there is something to gain from that faith, then maybe there is some light to be found in other avenues of God's truth, God's message to the world. You see, stories about light, well-told, are stories about opening, about vision, about seeing more rather than less, stories about new definition and sharpness.

Stories about light teach us that we are God's people even when we are not perfect. Peter stumbles back down the mountain to deny the Shining One three times when he is in trouble. James and John, ask for special favors on the way back down the hill, and then hide with the rest when the chips are on the table. They are not always completely up to the task but they know they have had a brush with the divine. They don't always get it right, but they are changed by this seeing, when Jesus is transfigured they are transformed, from mere followers to ambassadors, witnesses, "rememberers," keepers of the tale. By their stories and their lives they continued to remind us and everyone they encountered that something special had arisen in Galilee, something heralded by stars and ancient wisdom at its birth, Something, that healed others by touch, and taught love over law, something that knew the love of a mother and the care of a community and the loneliness of traveling one's own path in integrity. This something, this light, this God with us, this eternal word, this love, this message comes into the light today, clear and beautiful and shining for all who will see. And, that makes all the difference. In this Shining we are freed from the bondage of darkness. In this Shining, we become children of light.

And not just light, but more. We are not called through these waters to be merely spectators at a mountaintop display of God's glory, we are called to give ourselves up for the success of God's kingdom. Called to sacrifice our narrow perspective to see things in the dazzling light of Jesus' transfiguration. Called to bring others to this font that their lives may be

changed and broken and resurrected. We are called to be light, but we are also called to be bread. You should have known that I was eventually going to get around to bread..

Bread kneaded, pushed into shape by the hands of a God who makes and molds us. Bread broken so that we are no longer the pretty crusty loaf, but pieces passed around to all who are hungry for God's good news. Broken to be shared by others, broken perhaps by the world.

Bread given for the needs of others, not just the needs we bring to Jesus ourselves.

This bread that Jesus continually threatens to give the world, this bread that will be the foundation of reconciliation, peace, justice, this bread that we are waiting for, is most likely my brothers and sisters nobody but us. The savior who is transfigured for us to truly see today did not mince words, but calls us to continue his work, his mission, his lifelong project of giving himself for others. It is not enough for us to just be the light, shining out to others. We must also be the bread that changes history, that heals the nations, that feeds the world.

I don't believe Jesus just yammers away through 4 chapters of John's gospel because he loses track of time, Like it or not, I believe that Jesus was laying the responsibility of the world and all that it needs at our feet. And telling us that in his name and in his cause we will find everything we need to change the world. All the words, all the acts of Jesus' ministry all these align to a central theme that is not about magic and mystery. All these things align to point to the two things God is sending out to make a difference in the world. And those two things are you and me.

“This is my son, my chosen, Listen to him!”

Through the Paschal mystery dear friends, we are buried with Christ by Baptism into his death, and raised with him to newness of life. I call upon you therefore on this Feast of Christ's Transfiguration, to renew the solemn promises and vows of Holy Baptism, by which we once renounced Satan and all his works and promised to serve God faithfully in his Holy Catholic Church.

Page 308 is where the prayer after baptism is found.