

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Mar 1st 2015

What is the call of the mountain?

The story of the Transfiguration makes me think of many things. The first is my childhood parish. We belonged to the Church of the Transfiguration. I look forward to returning there this month for a visit after 30 years. Secondly, since I facilitated a retreat on the Transfiguration a couple years ago, I think of David Haas' song, Song of Transformation. It begins, "Transform us as you transfigured."

Transform and transfigure are very similar words. In my mind though, transfigure is external, transform can have a connotation of internal change. This line also makes me ask the question, who was the "event" of the Transfiguration for? An argument could be made that it was for Jesus especially when we read the version from Luke. Luke tells us of the conversation between Moses, Elijah and Jesus being about his Exodus, the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus about to take place. But then why bring Peter, James and John with him? They were apparently really tired. I think that Jesus wanted them to witness his glorification. He wanted to give them hope over the coming weeks but also to invite them into his glorification.

Remember what happens when they come down off the mountain? They meet up with the other disciples who were not able to exorcise the demon. In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, Jesus gets perturbed. It seems he is saying, what do you mean you can't do it? Don't you get it yet? I wonder if he was sending the apostles out but they had not been transformed, changed in their being, to a state of belief that would allow them to exorcise the demon. I think the Transfiguration is, among many other things, an invitation to us for transformation. So how do we answer that invitation?

First, we must acknowledge that we cannot transform ourselves. Jesus is the only one who can transform us. We can only be open to being transformed. The reading from Genesis has a key to help us be open. The messenger from God tells Abraham, "... because you acted as you did in not withholding from me your beloved son, I will bless you abundantly ...". I hear in this phrase the question what do I withhold from God that could get in the way of transformation? Said differently, what do I hold on to, what am I attached to, what is binding me? Is this not the call of the Lenten season? To become aware of and let go of all that gets in the way of our relationship with God? To let go of what prevents us of being transformed?

As we enter the heart of the Lenten season, let's take some time to reflect on how Jesus is calling us to transformation and ask ourselves, what are we withholding from God? What is keeping us from being open to the love of Christ which will transform us if we let it?

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