

From The Pastor

As it is, God is too much for us. As much as we long for God, and seek God in the midst and messiness of our lives, God is beyond what we can manage. In our human spirit, there is a longing and a desire for God, while at the same time there is a very persistent resistance to God. This is the nature of the spiritual life.

Because the transcendent power of God is beyond our capacity, we surrender to the measured expression of this power through the rituals and sacraments of the Church. The sacraments convey the mysteries of God to us in a way that we do not have to face God directly. This is a good thing. Who can see and encounter God so directly in the throws of daily life and still hold it all together? God needs a mediator. The divine power must be turned down in such a way that we, as humble creatures, can know and relate to our Creator without being utterly overwhelmed.

Jesus is the mediator of the divine power and presence. He is the image and presence, in the flesh, of the invisible transcendent God. Even in Jesus however, the divine presence can be overwhelming. Our natural tendencies for the human way of being kick in, and we resist the message and the power of God in Jesus. This resistance can come in the form of misunderstanding, refusal to accept, or simply an unwillingness to listen to the message.

Don't get me wrong. It is hard to know and follow Jesus, and accept his way. Because the way of God revealed in Christ is difficult, we need from time to time, experiences that challenge or convert us in a way to both listen to God and obey what we hear. This is the experience of the Transfiguration.

Peter, James and John loved Jesus, and they willingly followed him. However, to follow him did not mean that they understood who he was, and why he was so insistent on being killed. Because they loved Jesus, and because they did not fully know who he was, they resisted his prediction about suffering and dying. We too love Jesus, and want to follow him as nearly as possible. Yet, it is not easy and we would like to see more clearly how it is all suppose to be. So, we too resist. We hear the Word of God, we know and give intellectual ascent to the truths of the gospel, but we do not always listen to what we hear. We hesitate to act and go forward.

This is the purpose and the intention of the Transfiguration. It is not as much about Jesus, as it is about the disciples. Jesus knows who he is. He is confident and secure in his identity with the Father and the path he is to follow. What he needs is for the disciples to see and listen to Him in a way that will empower them to go forward with him in faith and trust.

When Jesus is transfigured before them, they see his inner reality as it is in relation to the Father. In Jesus, they see the light and the truth of God. With this vision, they fall to the ground in fear. We cannot see God and live. They realize what they are seeing and can only fall on their faces in fear. The radiance of divine glory, the fullness of divine love and truth is made visible to them in the face of Jesus.

In such an experience, who wouldn't resist? It is all together too much. Yet, there is more. Moses and Elijah represent the work of God through the Law and the Prophets. But Jesus is more than the Law, and he is the fulfillment of the Prophets. He is the fullness of all that God is. He is all truth, and the disciples now see this in an unquestioning way. Similar to the experience of Jesus' baptism, they hear the voice of God speak of his Son. The voice is clearly directed to the disciples, but with one essential addition. Jesus is identified as the beloved Son of the Father, but with an additional imperative. Now they must 'listen to him'.

To listen to is obey, to act on what one hears. The experience is not for Jesus' sake, but for the disciples. Confirmed in knowing his full identity, the disciples are to put aside their resistance and listen to all Jesus says. They can now go forward with Jesus because through the experience they have seen his glory and power as God.

Does this make it all easy? Of course not, but they are commissioned to bring the experience of the mountain top down into normal life where they really live. With this experience, though shocked and traumatized by the death of Jesus, they can stay with Him with trust and hope.

What does the Transfiguration mean for you and me? The same thing it meant for Peter, James, and John. Do we believe what we say we believe about Jesus? Do we listen to him and act on what we hear? If we are convinced that Jesus is the Son of God, why do we resist his presence and power in our lives, hesitant to be his agents of grace to one another? Resist no more. Jesus is the Son of God and his power will be with all those who listen to him and accept the power of his life and love. Quite literally, what is seen and revealed in Jesus is to be seen and known in ourselves. As Children of God, we have been given the power to act in the name of Jesus. Let us 'get up, and not be afraid'.

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