

Transfiguration of the Lord

August 6, 2017

INTRODUCTION: (*Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; 2 Peter 1:16-19; Mt. 17:1-9*); Our first reading is from the Book of Daniel. At the time it was written, about 165 years before Christ, the Greeks were pressuring the Jews to give up their faith in YHWH and join the pagan religions. The unknown author of Daniel is trying to assure God's people that God's law and God's teachings will triumph in the end. That leads us to today's first reading. Daniel is given a vision of this victory. The reading starts with a vision of God who is referred to as the Ancient One (implying he has existed from all eternity). One like a Son of Man received from the Ancient One dominion, glory and a kingship that would be everlasting. This is an important passage because Son of Man is one of the most frequently used titles Jesus used when he spoke about himself.

HOMILY: The transfiguration apparently is a one-time event in the life of Jesus – so unique that three gospels speak of it and Peter refers to it in one of his letters – which is the second reading for today. What is so unique about it? Jesus' special and unique nature revealed itself on other occasions such as walking on water, calming a storm, healing the sick, raising the dead and feeding a group of a few thousand people in a miraculous way with five loaves and two fish. The transfiguration seems especially unique because it is a miracle that comes out of his very self – not to be repeated again until his resurrection.

I have always believed that the transfiguration happened to boost the Apostles' faith as well as to strengthen Jesus' faithfulness to the mission of his suffering which was rapidly approaching.

Recently a person asked me what God looked like. I told the person I did not know. He said "you're supposed to know that kind of stuff." God hasn't appeared to me, but if we could see God, it would involve seeing him with our mind and heart. I think to see him with our eyes in the fullness of his glory would be too powerful for our senses and our body to endure. Today's gospel gives us a hint of the glory that could not be seen in Jesus, except on this one occasion. Of course, his glory did shine more brightly after his resurrection.

What can we take with us from today's feast? The first thing is the word of God regarding Jesus: "This is my beloved son: listen to him." Listening to him presupposes that we take time to reflect on his teachings. If we never stop to listen, we will never learn the way he wants us to live. Second: occasionally, while you are praying, you may find yourself having what could be called a spiritual high. This usually happens during prayer and I believe these high moments happen at various times in people's lives. In those moments, we experience God's love and care in an especially powerful way. Like Peter, we would like to hold on to that feeling forever. It may help our faith be stronger, or it may come to us to help us deal with what might be a very difficult time we've been having or that we are about to have. Treasure those moments. Thank God for them. Now, as we continue on with the Mass, let us thank God for the blessings we've been given and ask God's blessings for the needs we have.

INTRODUCTION: Our first reading today takes us back roughly 850 years before Christ. It was the time of Elijah the prophet. Ahaz was king in Israel, but the real power behind the throne was the infamous Queen Jezebel. Jezebel was an impassioned promoter of paganism and of the worship of the Canaanite god Baal. Elijah, of course, was just as passionate in trying to keep God's people faithful to the God of Israel, YHWH. So you might imagine they would clash and they did. Elijah challenged all the prophets of Baal to a contest on Mt. Carmel which ended in Elijah's victory and the annihilation of all the pagan prophets. He did not destroy them in a Christian manner, but Christ wouldn't be born for another eight and a half centuries. In spite of the obvious outcome of the contest between Elijah and the pagan priests of Baal, which proved Israel's God was THE true God, Jezebel was not convinced and she vowed blood vengeance on Elijah. To save his life, Elijah fled from Israel to Mt. Horeb in Sinai, the very same place where Moses gave Israel the Ten Commandments and where God made a covenant with Israel. There Elijah heard God's voice, not in dramatic natural phenomena, but in the silence of his heart. It's amazing what we can hear when we really listen.

HOMILY: We need to remind ourselves today about a two-year pledge we made last year. To do that, let me give you a little history. When I came here 26 years ago, whenever neighborhood people needed food or financial help, they came to the kitchen door or they hunted down the pastor. Our very dedicated housekeeper was worn out some days taking care of her responsibilities as well as constantly running to the door to help people. Other churches responded to calls from needy people in the same way. That's when Northside's pastors decided to work together. As most of you know, CAIN (which stands for Churches Active in Northside) is a kind of satellite ministry of St. Boniface. With other parishes in the neighborhood, we established various specific times when all food pantries would be open. Ours would be open on Saturday. This arrangement resulted in less stress on our staff and also it helped us know who was really needy and who might be taking advantage of us.

Things have changed in the past 26 years. We used to just hand out a bag of groceries when someone came for food. Now we can offer a selection of foods which lets people make a choice of what they might want to eat and ignore the food they would likely throw away. CAIN now has a house on Hamilton Avenue where food can be stored and distributed. They also have a hot meal once a week for whoever comes.

CAINs house needed some remodeling that will be more accommodating to their ministry. Here is where we come in. You might remember last year we took up a collection. The CAIN board dedicated the kitchen to me. I hope that doesn't mean they expect me to come and do dishes every week. CAIN asked for a two- year pledge and St. Boniface pledged \$25,000. We (the Parish Council and myself) thought this was a fair amount to pledge and I believe it was. The house is about 90 % finished, so they still need our support to finish it up. Last year we received \$18,000 in the collection –

which was about 70% of what we needed. Another \$7,000 would complete the pledge. So if you can give about 30% of what you gave to CAIN last year, we should be good.

There is an envelope in the pews addressed to CAIN. Please use that envelope and simply send it to CAIN or bring it with you on Sunday and put it in the collection. If you are writing a check, please make it out to CAIN.

Feast of the Assumption – Vigil Mass

August 14, 2017

INTRODUCTION AT THE VIGIL

People often confuse the Ascension and the Assumption. The Ascension commemorates Jesus ascending into heaven and taking his place at the right hand of God. It is celebrated on the Seventh Sunday of Easter. The Assumption commemorates our belief that Mary, after her life on this earth had come to an end, was raised up to eternal life and was taken into heaven, body and soul. It was only fitting that she who was Jesus' mother, and who was full of grace her entire life, should share first, before all others, in the risen glory of her Son. The Assumption was declared an official dogma by Pope Pius XII in 1950, but it had been believed and celebrated for centuries before that.

Our first reading (*1 Chronicles 15, 3-4, 15-16; 16, 1-2*) is about the Ark of the Covenant, the sacred gold-plated box that contained the Ten Commandments. The Ark was the unique symbol of God's presence with Israel. When King David established his capital in Jerusalem about the year 1000 BC, he brought the Ark there. Today's reading expresses this solemn and joyful occasion. The joy it describes applies to today's feast, for...

In Christian symbolism, Mary is sometimes referred to as the Ark of the Covenant. Just as God was present in a special way wherever the Ark was moved to, so God was present with Mary in a most special way when she carried within her womb the only Son of God, Jesus our Savior.

The early Christians also saw Jerusalem as a symbol of heaven. That symbolism is reflected in today's first reading. The Ark being taken up to Jerusalem symbolizes Mary being taken body and soul into the heavenly Jerusalem.

HOMILY: Mary's assumption into heavenly glory is not explicitly described in the Scriptures. As St. John says at the end of his gospel, the Scriptures do not tell us everything that could be said about Jesus, about what he said or did. Nor does it tell us everything about Mary or the Apostles or the early Church. The Church has believed for centuries that Mary was so honored in the assumption because no one followed Christ as perfectly as she did, thus it is perfectly appropriate that Mary would follow him into eternal glory, body and soul.

There is a legend that when Mary's life came to an end, the apostles buried her. Thomas, however, was not there at the time and when he returned he wanted to see for himself that she had died. When they opened her tomb, her body was gone. It had been raised and was taken to heaven by her Son who crowned her as queen. St. Francis de Sales said: "What son would not bring his mother back to life and would not bring her into paradise after her death if he could?"

We celebrate the honor and privilege given to Mary. Today, in Mary, we also celebrate our hope of final glorification when Christ will raise up to new life all those who have followed him faithfully. In the gospel a woman from the crowd called Mary blessed, but Jesus reminds us why she was truly blessed in that she "heard God's word obeyed it."

INTRODUCTION on the feast itself:

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The book of Revelation is highly symbolic. Some of the symbolism requires a fairly extensive knowledge of Scripture to interpret many of the symbols. In today's first reading, we hear about a woman, a child and a dragon. The dragon is the devil and the powers of evil at work in the world. The child is Christ. The woman in our reading has a double symbolism. She stands for Mary, the physical mother of Jesus Christ, and she stands for the Church, our spiritual mother who brings Jesus Christ to birth in us through faith and the sacraments. In today's passage, the woman is rescued from the powers of the dragon and is described in great glory. This too has a double symbolism. It symbolizes the glory of Mary in the assumption. It also symbolizes God's faithful people whom he will rescue from evil and will bring into the glory of heaven in the resurrection on the last day.

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time— A Cycle

August 20, 2017

INTRODUCTION: (*Isaiah 56,1-6-7; Romans 11,13-15.29-32; Matthew 15,21-28*)

Our theme is expressed in the psalm refrain: "O God, let all the nations praise you." God wants all nations and all people to know him and love him, and God desires to share his love with all people. Our first reading comes from about 500 years before Christ. It presented a radical view of God's love, which reached out to all people. It was radical because the Jews saw themselves as God's chosen people, and they were, but this reading speaks of a time when even foreigners; i.e., Gentiles, would serve as priests offering sacrifice to God.

HOMILY: Jesus was sent to do a job. He said his job was to preach to the Jews. Rarely did he step beyond the boundary of his mission. When he sent his apostles out to do ministry, he even made it clear to them that they were to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. True, the day would come when people of every race would be counted among God's chosen people in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy which we heard in today's first reading. But this was not yet the time. I am grateful that I have been born at a time when God's blessings have been made available to people of all nations.

Jesus had pretty much finished up his ministry in Galilee. He headed for the territory of Tyre and Sidon - a pagan territory. It was a territory that was hostile to the Jewish people. It seems Jesus wanted to get away from the crowds so he could spend time with his disciples. A woman, probably financially well off, approached Jesus with her concern about her daughter. For whatever reason, no one knows, although the more I think about this story, the more I picture this woman as a person used to having things go her way. At any rate, for some reason or another, Jesus rejected her request for a healing for her daughter. Perhaps Jesus thought she didn't have enough faith or she needed a little more humility along with her request. Moreover, helping her took him beyond the boundaries of the job he was sent to do.

It turns out, her faith and humility were enough to win him over when she accepted his insulting remark: "it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." And so the Lord changed his mind. Her love for her daughter far outweighed any pride she may have had as she accepted his insulting remark. However, I don't know how much of an insult it was. It sounds very offensive to our ears. Possibly the term dog is not all that insulting, in so far as the word means a little dog (like a house pet) and not a mangy wild animal.

When most people hear about this event, the thing they most remember is the reference to dogs. However, the main lesson in today's gospel is that God calls all people into his kingdom of love. There is too much hatred in our world today. That is not what we as Christians need to be about. We are called to love. Sometimes that's hard, especially when Jesus tells us to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." We are often tempted to feel hatred for some of the things we see or hear. The people who do hateful things do not need our hateful response. They need our prayers. "Pray for those who persecute you." Amen.

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time – A Cycle

August 27, 2017

INTRODUCTION – Our first reading takes us back 700 years before Christ. King Hezekiah, a good king, reigned in Judeah. Shebna was the second most powerful man in the court of the King. Shebna took advantage of his position by abusing and cheating those under his authority. God said, through the prophet Isaiah, that Shebna would be replaced by a person with integrity. His replacement was Eliakim who ruled with fairness and honesty. The only reason we have this reading today is because of the

reference to the key of the House of David. Keys are symbols of authority. In our gospel Jesus promised he would give Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

HOMILY – In today's gospel, Jesus asks that all- important question: "who do you say that I am?" He wasn't asking for assurance as to who he was. He knew who he was. Peter, as always showing great leadership potential, gave Jesus the right answer: "you are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." It is a question and answer that affects all of us in what we do and how we live. How it affects us personally (whether we come to Church, whether we pray, whether we keep the Commandments), just begins to describe how it affects us. Actually, how we answer this question affects every person in how they should live.

This question needs to be asked here. Why did the early Church have such an interest in St. Peter? Consider that Peter was long dead (for 25 years) when Matthew was writing his gospel. When Jesus said he would build his Church on Peter, Jesus meant he was not simply building on Peter's confession of faith, but Peter would be the foundation of his Church and his position in the Church would last even after Peter was long gone. We, as Catholics, see the leadership of Peter continuing in his successors. Otherwise, why spend a long time discussing Peter's role if it were to have no significance. The symbolic key which Jesus gave Peter would be passed along to the next person to follow Peter and then the next person and so on. Whoever would have the key would have the authority and the power to "open and none shall close or to close and none shall open;" i.e., to rule with authority. It is told later in Matthew's gospel that this power would be shared with all the apostles. (Mt. 18,18)

The passage ends with Jesus telling his Apostles not to reveal that he was the Messiah. That's because he had more to teach them. Suffering is a part of this picture - a topic we will hear more about next week.