



ST JOSEPH SYRO MALABAR CATHOLIC MISSION SAN DIEGO

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REV FR SONEY SEBASTIAN SVD

Sunday Readings and Meditation

August 6, 2023 Fourth Sunday Season of the Growth of the Church
Transfiguration of our Lord Mt 17:1-9

In all three Synoptic gospels the story of the Transfiguration occurs in the same context, and that context is significant. Today's verses are in the middle of the Gospel account and things have been building up to a climax. As the disciples spend more time with Jesus, as they hear what he is saying and see what he is doing, they must have been asking, "Who is this Rabbi to whom we have attached ourselves; who is this Jesus?" Strangely, the answer comes from their own mouths.

One day, when Jesus was with them, he asked them: Who do people say the Son of Man is?

Jesus was using this strange title of himself. Based on what they must have been hearing from people around them, they said there were various speculative answers – John the Baptist resurrected from the dead, Elijah or some other of the prophets.

Jesus then pressed them further: But who do you say I am? It is then that Peter speaks up: You are the Messiah, the Christ.

It was a peak moment in their relationship with Jesus, and an exciting one. How their imaginations must have begun to work on what it meant to be so closely associated with the Messiah, the King who would be the Saviour and Liberator of Israel! What glories and privileges awaited them as his disciples!

But almost immediately, Jesus begins to speak in a very different way. For the first time he tells them what the future is going to be. And it must have come as a terrible shock, Jesus told them he was going to suffer greatly, be rejected by the leaders of their own people, be killed and then rise again after three days. They could not believe their ears. How could this happen to the Messiah? How could their own leaders do such a thing? And what would it mean for the dazzling future they saw dangling before their eyes?

The impetuous Peter immediately stepped forward. He cried: This cannot happen to you! He can hardly have expected the reaction of Jesus: Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me!

And while they are recovering from this, Jesus continues by saying that not only will he himself suffer but, if they want to be his disciples, they will have to be ready to walk the same road: Those who wish to follow me must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.

It is after this depressing situation of disillusionment and incomprehension that the Transfiguration takes place. We are told that six days later Jesus took Peter, James and his brother John up a high mountain by



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Transfiguration of our Lord

themselves. There before them Jesus is suddenly transformed, dazzlingly bright. They can hardly look on him. Suddenly there appear with him Moses and Elijah. They represent the whole Jewish tradition of the Law and the Prophets. They are seen talking with Jesus. The message is clear. They fully endorse what Jesus is doing and saying and the future he has foretold about himself.

Peter becomes utterly confused. He suggests the building of three shelters – one each for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. As Mark comments: He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified.

But that was not all. Just then, a cloud came down and covered them. This was not just a change in the weather. To the biblical mind it spoke of only one thing – the presence of Yahweh himself. And then out of the cloud came a voice; it could only be the voice of One Being: This is my beloved Son; listen to him.

Here now is the supreme endorsement of the Son by his Father. “Listen to him.” Yes, listen, even when he says things that you don’t like, things that you do not yet understand. It is a confirmation of all that has gone on before – the real identity of who Jesus is and the reliability of everything that he says will happen to him and what is expected of them.

It is a special moment of encouragement which will help carry them through the difficult days ahead. They already have the answer to the question, “Who is Jesus?” But now they have to learn the answer to a more important question, “What kind of Messiah is Jesus going to be?” They will not fully appropriate that until after the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus when they will boldly continue his mission and not hesitate to carry their cross in doing so.

Let us follow in their footsteps. That is where true happiness and fulfilment lie.

Peter later on in his letter referring to the Transfiguration experience says they had been “eyewitnesses of his majesty”. He and his companions heard the words of confirmation coming from God in his glory: This is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.

They heard this voice which came: ...from heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain.

Hence, the message that he and his companions are now proclaiming is “altogether reliable” and we should take it very seriously. Because, he says in a lovely phrase, this message is: ...light shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

First Reading: Ex 19:1-8 + 20:18-21 Second Reading: Acts 1:15-26 Third Reading: Heb 12:18-29