

[Readings: Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; Psalm 97; 2 Peter 1:16-19; Matt. 17:1-9]

When I was a student at Orchard Lake St. Mary's College, saying this Feast Day in Polish was a challenge: Swieto Przemienienie Panskiego – try saying THAT fast five times! We seldom hear the readings for the Transfiguration because it is not a Holy Day of Obligation, unless like this year, it falls on a Sunday. That is why we have these readings today instead of the observance of the 18th Sunday of Ordinary Time.

The Book of Daniel is named after the hero of the stories in its first six chapters. Daniel, who has a special gift of wisdom, has been chosen along with three other young Jewish exiles in Babylon, to serve in the court of the King. These are the famous Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who survive the fiery furnace and the lion's den. Beginning with Chapter 7, today's excerpt, we hear about a series of visions. They are called "apocalyptic" – a type of vivid, dramatic narrative written during times of persecution. It doesn't have the same "end of the world" tone that today's apocalyptic movies have. These visions are meant to bring comfort and strength to those going through rough times. The Son of Man appears in majesty and glory. He is the precursor to the Messiah. Today's First Reading foreshadows what happens in today's Gospel.

St. Peter gives his own testimony to the Gospel in today's Second Reading. "We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven while we were with Him on the holy mountain." "This is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Parents, you have no idea how powerful these words are to your children, regardless of their age, when you say to them: "I'm proud of you."

Some background to today's Gospel. Jesus Christ has just completed the three years of His public ministry. He and his apostles and disciples are returning to Jerusalem for the High Holy Days of Passover. He is scheduled to enter the city gates within a few days on what would be forever known as Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord. He takes His three top Apostles (Peter, John and James) to a mountain top, where He is transfigured before their eyes.

The word “transfigured” in Greek means a couple of things. It literally means “the change of the body” but here, it is “the insides moving outside.” The inner glory of God shines on the outside. Imagine if OUR insides were made outside. We see someone we don’t like who approaches and greets us. Then WE say, “Hi, I hate your guts!” But the insides of Jesus reveal divine love and majesty. In that same scene Moses (representing the Jewish Law) and Elijah (representing the prophets) also appear and converse with the Lord. Matthew is saying here that as important as Moses and Elijah are, Jesus is even greater.

Most Bible scholars agree that this was the “last hurrah” miracle of human encouragement that Jesus gives His friends before He would be arrested, tortured, and killed, and then risen from the dead. Jesus wants joyful, missionary disciples. This glimpse of His current and future glory helps bring that about.

You and I are You and I are today’s “joyful, missionary disciples” who once in a while need that refreshing boost to continue on what can be a tiring and perilous life journey in faith. The Transfiguration is meant to be a morale booster.

What dangers are exhausting you today? What struggles, illness and issues do you bring to the mountaintop to be transformed, transfigured?

Archbishop Allen Vigneron, in his pastoral letter, “Unleash the Gospel,” has words of encouragement for families to be “transformed” into joyful, missionary disciples. To be stronger families and to become a brighter witness to our culture. I include them in today’ bulletin. I hope you get a chance to share these with all the members of your household and your families. They are:

Reclaim Sunday as a family day. Make it a priority in your lives to spend time together without distractions, including sharing Sunday meals together.

Commit to forming your family in the love and power of sacred Scripture by reading Scripture together. Read and pray the Sunday readings together before coming to Sunday Mass. Participate in Bible studies together and go to parish events to unleash the Gospel in your family. Discuss the Sunday homily.

Commit to developing prayer time together. Make time to listen, share, and grow together as a family guided by the Lord. Talk about faith, and share why your faith is important to you. Ask others what inspires their faith.

Participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a family. Get to Confession. Try to heal wounds and brokenness in your family through sacrifice, forgiveness, mercy, and love. Pope Francis says the three phrases you need to say the most are: "Thank you," "May I?" and "I'm sorry." How often do we say these words? When was the last time we said them to our loved ones?

Create a home where your family models Christ's love. Help others by becoming aware of your neighbor's needs and by reaching out to them as a family with a welcoming spirit so as to share your faith living and in action.

I am inspired and humbled when I visit our homebound parishioners. They tell me about you folks taking care of their very practical needs. You shovel their snow and cut their grass. You run errands for them and take them to the doctor. You bring the Blessed Sacrament to them in Holy Communion. In this way you preach a better homily than I ever could from this pulpit.

Parents, remember that you are called to be "the first and the best" teachers of faith for your family. If you don't know the answer to faith questions, learn them! Commit to trying at least one or two or three of these suggestions. Let the Holy Spirit come upon you and overshadow you. Be transfigured. Open wide the doors of your heart. Be not afraid to "Unleash the Gospel!" AMEN!