

Last Sunday of Epiphany
Transfiguration
St. Matthew 17:1-9
February 26th, 2017
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

The View of the Ordinary Changed

“And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.”

This last Sunday of the Epiphany is like a bookend: there is today, and then on the other end, there is Easter. In each case, the view of the ordinary is changed into something quite extraordinary!

On the first bookend, Jesus is changed before the eyes of a select few of his disciples. He is glowing. They have not seen this side of Jesus. They were only familiar with the striking, brilliant, wise and kind itinerant preacher, the great Rabbi, whom they had come to know and follow. This is something very different.

On the second bookend, Jesus is raised from the dead, at first appearing to a select small group of disciples, and then to many, glowing and changed: totally transformed so that the disciples no longer recognized Him right off the bat. This is something not only very different; it is something mankind has not seen before or since.

We do not expect to see someone glowing like the sun, his clothes becoming “dazzling white.” Someone with whom they had become familiar has been transformed before their eyes.

Familiarity falls away, and something new is revealed. There are many layers to the onion, and only a few are peeled away to present Jesus as at least touched by the Holy One of Israel, if not much more.

Jesus was their friend. Jesus was their teacher. Jesus was special, but He was *familiar* to them. Such familiarity changes how we see someone. We begin to think we know everything there is to know about them. It is like a marriage after a few years. The mystery and awe we once felt deeply toward the object of our affection fades away into a familiarity of the ordinary every day life. We start to take things for granted. The holiness and specialness of the moment is lost.

The disciples might have had an inkling about who Jesus really is, but it became lost in their reduced expectations as they became more familiar with him. They could only know in part, and they could only know what he showed them. They could only see what their eyes were ready to see, and their minds open to grasp.

Our experience of the holy is the same way. Most of us here have walked a long way with Jesus in this Church. He has become an old familiar friend to us. Living with God is a comfortable place to be, a place that nurtures us if we allow God to come inside us, into our hearts and minds. In our familiarity with the holy, (not such a bad thing), the holy becomes like a spouse to whom we have been married a long time. And some of the mystery and awe and wonder about the other is lost.

Perhaps, we fear, the mystery and awe might be lost forever. In our consumer—trained mentality, we then think about disposing of the old and trying something new and different.

Today's story reminds us that we can recover that sense of wonder and mystery. The ordinary, which stands before us, has the power of being transfigured before our eyes. We can see the ordinary in a new light, with the help of God, and the ordinary can be transformed into the extraordinary once again.

Much of our lives are spent like driving in a tunnel, looking straight ahead, without noticing more than what is right in front of us. Such tunnel vision blurs the possibility of observing God in the midst of our daily life. What we see every day takes on a new look as our perspective is changed. Instead of focusing on what we think things are, our eyes are open to see what *is*.

For example, we see a bit of nature every day. If we step into nature and look more closely, it is transformed into a magical place. The woods appear to be like a great cathedral, full of majesty, mystery and awe. And God is felt strongly in the midst of it all. You can feel His presence. It is a special holy mystery that envelops you.

Being in the presence of the holy changes you. Contact with God produces this effect in the annals of the scriptures. One of the most notable stories is when Moses is up on Mt. Sinai, after receiving the law on the tablets and conversing with God, those who see him describe what they saw in much same way as Jesus in this morning's Gospel: [Exodus 34:29-35]

"When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the

community came back to him, and he spoke to them. Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai. When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever he entered the LORD's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD."

We are immediately reminded of today's Gospel passage, and the transformation of the appearance of Jesus while he was in the presence of God. It is also interesting that Moses is amongst those who appear to the disciples during this event. What strikes me about all of these stories of meeting God is the potential for finding the Holy in the midst of the ordinary. In fact, you might say, the Holy is right in front of us much of the time, and we just don't get it.

"And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white" Thus the connection is drawn between the experience of Moses in the presence of the Holy and the experience of Jesus in the transfiguration on the mountaintop.

The inner circle of disciples would remember this moment. We also remember it today as we stand at the edge of the Lenten season, a transformative time for us, as we wander in the wilderness with God for the next 40 days beginning this Wednesday. It foreshadows the change we hope will occur in each of us.

These are times for us to step into the presence of the holy and be changed by God, a change I trust will not be abandoned like the work of dieting when the weight goal is achieved. There is no such thing as a successful diet. *It is always about making a lifestyle change!*

We need to see what we take for ordinary from a new perspective. We need to stop assuming we know what we can expect from the world around us, which we all too easily take for granted. We need a perspective shift. How does this happen? We must open our eyes, our ears, and our minds and our hearts again to see what is right in front of us in the midst of the ordinary, for there God dwells with us every day.

When we encounter the Holy, we will be changed by the experience. Are we afraid to change? We should not fear finding the Holy One in the ordinary. We should take great comfort in God's presence there. We come to know God by experiencing God in the ordinary, the hum—drum of every day life. If we say that we love God, how can we not look for the beloved each day, in all places and parts of our lives? Jesus lives not in the tomb, not in a box we place him in, but in the world where daily life is encountered, there he will be also. Open your eyes and look for him. But be ready to be changed! The more we look for him, the more we look like him to others who look at us.

Jesus spoke these words to Paul as he sent him forth on his mission to the Gentiles, [Acts 26:18] You are “...to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

Pray that the Lord will open your eyes. Have faith that he will answer this prayer, if it is from the heart. Just as Jesus opened the eyes of the blind and made them see, so He can open our blind eyes and help us see the presence of the Holy One all around us, every day.

And when our eyes are opened, as it says in Hebrews 12:2, *“Let us fix our eyes upon Jesus.”*

Let this be our prayer: ‘Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of His countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into His likeness from glory to glory.

AMEN.