

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 18th (Transfiguration) Year A1

“Hey come over here, I want to show you something!” Have you ever had that happen, when someone pulls you aside to share a word, meant to help you? They give you a glimpse of something, maybe not shared with or known by anyone else at that moment, but something that is going to come into play in a big way, most handily later on, to take care of what will need attention later.

I had that happen one time, at a church breakfast once, when right as I walked into the kitchen, a guy pulled me aside and said “Come with me, I want to show you something”. He led me down the hallway (it was an older building) and said “I’m about to leave but here is where the breaker panel is, and when the lights go out in the kitchen (& trust me they will), then come down here and flip this breaker.” Well, what was happening was that too much was trying to be cooked at one-time that morning for our pancake-sausage breakfast. When the electric ovens were on and nearly every outlet along the wall had table-top griddles some frying pancakes & some frying sausage, then someone turns on a coffee pot and then ‘POP’ the lights go out! He said, he had told workers to avoid using every outlet, but as they felt they were running behind a little, inevitably someone would plug in another one and then ‘Flip’ everything goes dark. So, with him saying, ‘I want to show you something’, he was taking a moment to let me in on something, that would resolve the problem to get the work done.

I think that is what Jesus is doing in the gospel today with his similar type ‘pulling aside’ of Peter, James and John. He shows them something meant to get them through whatever that may face ahead. He gives them a glimpse of His true identity as ‘God in Person with them’. Why them? Well they are Jesus’ chosen leaders among the apostles (as we will hear St Paul even call these three in Galatians 2:9, ‘pillars of the church’) Jesus wants them to remember and let this vision of His divinity be their strength & build their confidence later—so that whatever they face, whatever challenge they undergo, they will know His support is with them. He, with all this ‘pent up light and energy within’ is behind and with them. Not that everyone else has seen or knows it, or that it is always projected or seeping out through cracks in Jesus’ skin, but for those three at least as leaders, they can be comforted and strengthened to know that it is all in Jesus to help them (that show of radiant light and awesome force) is accessible for them. I

It is interesting to take note of just when in Jesus’ life of ministry with the

apostles, this super-flash of His divinity to Peter, James and John happens. Today's transfiguration happens in Matthew 17:1-8. Recall that in Matthew 16, v17-18, the previous chapter, Peter had confessed Jesus to be, 'Son of living God & Messiah', though just four verse later in 16:21, Peter will try pressuring Jesus to take the difficult cross carrying, out of Christianity-Peter wants to sugar over the sacrifice part of following Jesus." : Of course, Jesus quickly puts Peter in his place, shockingly saying back, 'Satan get behind me!' (Matt 16:23). So with Jesus' full display of divinity here, we see that **just using words to teach** the apostles (especially Peter, James & John) about the His Identity as 'God in flesh with them' wasn't enough. Jesus needed to give a demonstration to deeply touch their hearts, to impress His true identity upon them. So, we get the Transfiguration as Jesus' Display of Divinity! Not in the order of the game 'show and tell', but Jesus had first 'told' them but that didn't work, so now He 'shows' them. It took more than words to substantially impress His identity upon them!

I imagine this whole episode with Jesus, Peter, James and John, must have been quite the 'fireworks display' (v. 6 says 'they fell prostrate and were very much afraid'). This revelatory vision of Jesus in His full-form divine magnificence must have been like Moses' vision of God in the burning bush-or the experience of God for the Israelites atop Mt Sinai, in the lightning fire flashing). Quite the dramatic and convincing experience/encounter with God!

With such powerfully impressive experiences, everyone usually has some detail that dominates over the others. Maybe one aspect above all, that we just can't get out of our mind. I have one. Now, for many people, the lingering question is "Just how do Peter, James & John know that it is Moses & Elijah standing there with Jesus?" The historical time of Jesus was not an era pf Polaroid Photographs, and I'm sure Moses/Elijah don't have name placards hanging around their neck saying, "Hello, My name Is Moses'. I figure that similar to how we Catholics interpret our statues/holy cards, we can identify the saints by some clue or signal included with or on them. For example, we know that St Francis Assis is always surrounded by animals, or that the holy man holding 'keys' is St Peter! Similarly, I imagine that Peter, James & John saw distinguishing clues on Moses & Elijah, like Moses holding two stone tablets or Elijah's distinctive dress of camel hair and leather belt, or standing in a flaming chariot.

But that question is not the one that stuck with me. No, I want to know more about the **'bright cloud'** that cast shadow' (Matt 17:5) I'll never understand that one- a Bright cloud? I ask, "What cloud shines? I thought clouds blocked light, not gave out light!" But as with Peter, James and John, maybe experiencing Jesus; divinity is more than words- the paradox of Jesus' divinity shining through His human form. I think the phrase 'bright cloud, joins that group of other paradoxical phrases, like 'Jumbo shrimp', 'small crowd', 'live recording', 'acting natural' & 'square ring' in boxing, Or maybe even 'short sermon'. Do those go together? So, I used that phrase once to a friend about 'short sermon' and he says back, "Oh yeah, that is 'Seriously funny', right?" But like Jesus' Transfiguration, we can count on God to astound us, and maybe it takes such a **stretch of language** to communicate the unique manifestation of Jesus' Divinity to Peter, James and John and to us, because it is more than words! But that is the point of the Transfiguration, and it is meant to impress upon us, the realization that God is truly with us in Jesus. He shows us Himself, fully divine in this flash, so that we can more confidently trust that He will see us through any struggle, any difficulty we face. Such mountaintop experiences of God's presence is meant to convince and carry us through all of our other experiences down in the valley.