

[Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18; Ps. 27; Phil. 3:17-4:1; Luke 9: 28b-36]

Today's Gospel is called the Gospel of the Transfiguration, but it might help us to see it as a Gospel of Transformation. Transformation experiences – significant and subtle, good and bad – are part of being human. We experience transformation when we see a baby grow to full stature as an adult. But when that same human being is ravaged by some illness or disease, one has to look deeper to find the person's true beauty.

Have you had any transforming experiences that have left you better for the experience? Abram does in today's First Reading. He is made a solemn promise by God Himself, who "seals the deal" by "cutting a deal" (this is where the expression "to cut a deal" comes from.) Remember a few weeks ago when I said that to "cut a covenant" meant to stake your whole life on the agreement two parties make with each other. The animal sacrifices are carcasses cut in half and placed on a road. The two parties of the agreement walk between the severed halves, saying, "May this happen to me if I fail to fulfill this contract, this covenant." Here we have the actual description of God making His covenant with the human family with Abram.

We also remember that Abram – later to be called Abraham – was asleep, or in a dream-like trance of some kind and did not walk between the sacrificed animals. Only God commits Himself to the covenant here. Abram's commitment was to let God do everything!

I am grateful for the new translation of today's First Reading. In the old translation from the New American Bible, it says that "the Lord God appeared as a flaming brazier." Now a "brazier" is a metal container used to burn charcoal or other solid fuel for cooking. Unfortunately, most of the Lectors at Mass misread the word and said, "the Lord God appeared as a flaming brassiere."

It was the late, great Archbishop of Recife, Brazil, Dom Helder Camara, who said, "We must all be transformed so that people see Jesus shining out from us." People said that they saw Jesus shining in Dom Helder Camara's face. Have we seen that glow in people that reflects the very presence of Jesus?

Then we come to the Gospel story of the Transfiguration. As Jesus is transformed and is speaking to Moses and Elijah, representing the Jewish Law and the Prophets, the three sleeping disciples finally awake. Note that in both our First Reading and in our Gospel, the key people are asleep. Only God is alive and active in both scenes! Are you and I still “asleep?”

Imagine how the disciples must have felt seeing Jesus in a gloriously transformed state! Were they dreaming? What was happening? Could they even understand what they were experiencing? St. Peter is so overwhelmed with the glorious vision before him, he wants to build not two tents, but three tents.

To “build a tent” in the time of Jesus, was to establish residence. “My Father and I will come to them, and we will pitch our tents within them.”

God will establish His residence in the heart that welcomes him.

Peter doesn't want to leave the mountaintop. He wants to stay there forever with Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Then they hear the voice of God the Father say, “This is my chosen Son; listen to Him.” Again, I ask you to reflect on the transforming experiences in your life.

Especially those brought about by relationships and encounters with others. What promises have you made with God that remain unfulfilled? Why? Do you have a sense that God has fallen short in some way? What keeps you from honoring your covenant with God to remain faithful and listen to the words of Jesus?

During a pastoral visit with young people, Archbishop Allen Vigneron was asked a few personal questions following his formal presentation. The two that I remember from that experience were these: What do you like most about your job, and what do you like the least? His first answer, without hesitation was: teaching.

Archbishop Vigneron loves to teach. My own father, when he was preparing for the permanent diaconate, had to take several classes at the seminary. He told me that hands down, then-Monsignor Vigneron was his favorite teacher. He taught clearly and he graded fairly.

The thing that Archbishop Vigneron said he liked doing the least, the worst part of his job as Archbishop, was “dealing with difficult people.” He did not elaborate, but I cannot imagine the number of clergy, religious, lay people, e-mails, phone calls and meetings he has to deal with.

And all this is in addition to his VERY full sacramental ministry every day. Difficult people drain the Holy Spirit out of every encounter. They do the work of the Evil One. That should scare us.

Shortly after I recovered from my heart attack, triple bypass and recovery back in the summer of 2010, I saw Archbishop Vigneron at a function for clergy and lay people at the at the seminary.

I solemnly told him, “My cardiologist says that in order to complete my medical recovery, I need an immediate transfer. I need to be transferred to a parish where there is no worry, no stress and no anxiety.” His answer: “I have a great parish to send you that is worry-free, stress-free and anxiety-free. Unfortunately, there are no people in it!”

Just as the transfigured Jesus has a transforming effect on Peter, John and James, significant people have had a transforming effect on me. Most were married men and women and consecrated religious. There were times when I would be in conversation with them that our faces would just glow with love, holiness and delight. You can have that same transforming effect.

We start with our hearts burning during the Liturgy of the Word. The second is when we receive the very Jesus in whom God is well pleased. We hear our Heavenly Father say to us: “YOU are my chosen son, my chosen daughter.” And then we have to come down the mountain... And are charged with bringing God’s transforming power to the world.

To places where the people conduct themselves as enemies of Christ. We take the radiance of the glory of God, experienced in Word and Sacrament to those whose “God is their stomach and the glory is in their shame.” We accept the radiance of the glory of God within our own hearts and in our relationships, and carry that light into the darkness of the world. AMEN!