

The Transfiguration of Our Lord
The Last Sunday After the Epiphany

Monday Matthew 17: 1-5

The God Behind the Curtain

The "Wizard of Oz" is a delightful movie. Dorothy and her three friends believe all their problems can be settled by the wizard. If they can just reach him and get into see him, he can do for them the impossible things they need to have done. When they go before him, they are awed and frightened by his apparent size and power. But what happens when the little dog Toto pulls back the curtain and exposes a pitifully small, old man? Their hearts sink. This is the wizard their hopes had counted on? How can this ordinary, little man help them?

You just celebrated Transfiguration in Church yesterday. The opposite thing happened on that mountain. The disciples had been following Jesus for about three years. Yes, He did many powerful, wonderful miracles. He healed the sick, cast out demons, and even raised the dead. But He still looked like just a man. On the Mountain of Transfiguration, however, the curtain is pulled back.

Whoa! What do they see? This is no ordinary man! Men do not shine like the sun; the saints of heaven do not come to talk with ordinary men; God does not declare other men His Son. The curtain is pulled back, and the disciples see that Jesus does not just *use* the power of God, He *is* the power of God. They see that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily. He has more power, might, and majesty than they had ever imagined.

So when the curtain is pulled back for us on Transfiguration, the opposite from what happened to Dorothy and her friends happens to us. Where they were disappointed, we are encouraged. Where their hearts sunk, ours soar. Our Jesus can well handle our problems, deal with death and the devil, and get us safely back home to heaven. We were right all along to believe that this Jesus is the One to go to, to rely on, to bring our problems to. When the curtain was pulled back, Dorothy and her friends could never look at the wizard the same way again. The same is true for us when the curtain is pulled back on Jesus at the Transfiguration.

Prayer: O God, in the glorious transfiguration of Your only-begotten Son You once confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the ancient fathers and in the voice that came from the bright cloud You wondrously foreshowed our adoption by grace. Therefore mercifully make us coheirs with our King of His glory, and bring us to the fullness of our inheritance in heaven; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Tuesday Luke 9: 28-31

What Do People in Heaven Talk About?

Have you ever wondered what people talk about in heaven? Do they talk about the beautiful angels, the wonderful surroundings, the glory of God? From our reading today, we can say that they talk about Jesus. When Moses and Elijah come from heaven to the Mountain of Transfiguration, they do not come just to look at Jesus or even to just worship Him. They come to talk about His departure.

"Departure" is how some Bibles translate it, but the Greek word is actually "exodus." Just as Moses led God's people out of the sin and death that was in Egypt, so Jesus is leading people out of sin and death by being the Passover Lamb who will be slaughtered for their sins, by being the Firstborn Son whom God did not pass over but on whom He poured out all of His wrath against sinners.

Moses and Elijah, saints of heaven, talk about what you get to read and hear about this Lent/Easter season, the suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Although all of this happens down on earth, those in heaven are very much interested in it because it has to do with their salvation too.

What Jesus does for us, what Jesus goes through for us, what happens to Jesus in this upcoming Lent/Easter season is something worthy of wonder. I Peter 1:10-12 tells us that the angels in heaven literally stoop over as they long to figure out the strange workings of God. Yes, eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, neither has it entered into the thoughts of any person, what God would do to save us.

That is why we study, we read, we have preached to us, we even sing about the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. It is such wonderful, such great, such mysterious news that it even makes front page headlines in heaven. How much more for us who are in the Church still here on earth!

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Thursday Mark 9: 2-7

Heaven on Earth

You might have heard or read that there is no heaven on earth. Whoever said that must not have read our Bible reading for today. There you have the Father speaking, the Holy Spirit in the Cloudy Presence, and saints from heaven gathered about the Son. That is heaven and it was right here on earth on a mountain in Palestine.

Where Jesus is, there is heaven. Jesus is really present in the Holy Communion. He tells us that the very same Body He gave over to death and the same blood He shed on Calvary are present in the Holy Communion. That is why people bow and/or kneel when going to Holy Communion. Jesus, Lord of heaven and earth, is present in the bread and wine. O miracles of miracles, who can explain it? Who can help but adore it?

Where you find Jesus there is also the Father and the Holy Spirit. And where you find the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, there you find angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. We acknowledge that every Sunday in the Holy Communion liturgy, do not we? Your pastor closes a prayer called the Proper Preface with, "Therefore, with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising you and saying:"

By these words we are acknowledging that in the Holy Communion heaven and earth touch. Right where we are in our church, be it big or small, rich or poor, full or empty, or not even in a building at all, heaven and earth meet in the Holy Communion. The Holy things of heaven the angels, the mighty archangels, the saints of heaven, and even the God of heaven, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are right with us poor sinners.

Of course, the more amazing thing is that Jesus comes to us, and not because He wants to be worshiped or adored, although we do that, but because He wants to put His Holy Body and Blood into the very body of sinners. He wants sinners to know He is so much on their side that He wishes to feed them, forgive them, strengthen them with His very own Body and Blood. Unlike in the movies where the hero lays dying and says, "Go on without me," Jesus our hero, having risen from death, says, "Take eat; take drink; I will go on with you!"

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Friday Matthew 17: 3-7

Listen To Him

"Now you listen to me," an angry parent can say and the child knows that is a threat. He either listens or else. But this is not the Spirit with which God the Father speaks to His children on the Mountain of Transfiguration.

In the midst of the mighty, wonderful yet fearful revelation of Jesus as God in the flesh, God the Father speaks and commands the disciples, "Listen to Jesus." When the disciples heard the voice of God, "they fell facedown to the ground terrified." But what does Jesus say? What does the One whom they have just been commanded to listen to say? "Do not be afraid." What a joy! What a privilege! What a relief to be able to listen to Jesus! They thought they had reason to fear; they thought they had reason for terror; they could only see reason to be afraid. But the Father told them do not go by what you reason, think, or see; go by what Jesus says.

The command, "Listen to Jesus" is not Law but Gospel. We are not to go by what we see in the world, the children of God being cast out, but by what Jesus says in Baptism, "I have called you by name; you are Mine forever." We are not to go by what we think about our sins, the fear and guilt, but by the words Jesus speaks to us in Absolution: "I forgive you." We are not to go by what we see working in our body, sin, sickness, aging and death, but by what Jesus says to us in Holy Communion: "Take eat; take drink for forgiveness, life and salvation."

Have you ever seen a movie where a person is caught in a burning building? The fireman says, "Do not look at the smoke; do not look at the fire. Listen to my voice." In the world, we are often caught in situations where smoke billows all around us, fire licks at our feet, and fear clutches at our throat. "Listen to Jesus,≡ says our heavenly Father. AHis Words of forgiveness, mercy, and peace are more sure than anything you think, see, or fear." Even the words from an angel in heaven aren't more sure than His Word to you in your Baptism, in your Absolution, in the Holy Communion you eat and drink.≡

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Saturday Hebrews 11: 8-10

Do not Settle for Part

In our Collect this week we have been praying for our God to "bring us to the fullness of our inheritance in heaven." No matter what our blessings down here, how big our house, how full our bank account, how happy our life, this is not the fullness of our inheritance. We are but travelers on a journey through this life. If we put our roots down here, make it our goal to be satisfied, happy, and prosperous here, we are settling for only part of what God promises to give us.

Abraham was a very wealthy man. You might remember that he had over 300 servants **born** in his household. He defeated kings in battle. Had heads of state honoring him. But still he lived like a stranger in a foreign country. Think of it. When your family is on vacation, you do not try to become the mayor of the town you are traveling through. You do not become all upset if they are rerouting this street or tearing down that building. Why? Because you are just passing through. This is not your hometown. This is not where your hopes or dreams are located. No place on this earth is.

Like Abraham, we are looking forward to the city whose architect and builder is God. If we have a particularly nice life on earth, we need to constantly remind ourselves that this is not our home or goal. If we have a particularly difficult life down here, money is tight, our home is small, sickness is ever present, it will be much easier to remember that this is only part of our inheritance. This is only the tip of the iceberg. This is not the whole story.

You have probably read many stories. What if you stopped reading "Snow White" before the prince kisses her and wakes her up? What if you only read "Cinderella" as far as her step-sisters leaving for the ball without her? Then Snow White would be forever asleep and Cinderella would be left in ashes. But you know that is not how these stories end. God's story does not end for His people in this life. It ends with them safe and secure with Jesus in the City He won for them by dying on the cross. Do not settle for just a part of the story.

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