

The Sunday Missive – August 4, 2024
The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
The Feast of the Transfiguration

Hymn 616 Hail to the Lord's anointed Vv. 1, 3 & 5

Hail to the Lord's Anointed, great David's greater Son!
Hail, in the time appointed, his reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free;
To take away transgression, and rule in equity.

He shall come down like showers upon the fruitful earth,
And love, joy, hope, like flowers, spring in his path to birth;
Before him on the mountains shall peace, the herald, go;
And righteousness in fountains from hill to valley flow.

O'er every foe victorious, he on his throne shall rest;
From age to age more glorious, all blessing and all blest;
The tide of time shall never his covenant remove;
His Name shall stand for ever, his changeless Name of Love.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6dGmfAL5DY&t=162s>

The Collect of the Day

O God, who on the holy mount revealed to chosen witnesses your well-beloved Son, wonderfully transfigured, in raiment white and glistening: Mercifully grant that we, being delivered from the disquietude of this world, may by faith behold the King in his beauty; who with you, O Father, and you, O Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Exodus 34:29-35

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

Psalm 99

The Lord is our ruler let the people tremble* ***The Lord is enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth shake.***

The Lord is great in Zion* ***The Lord is high above all peoples.***

Let them confess God's name, who alone is great* ***Who alone is the Holy One of Israel.***

"O mighty One, lover of justice, you have established equity* ***You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.***

Proclaim the greatness of the Lord our God* ***Fall down before the footstool of the Holy One.***

Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel call upon God's name* ***They called upon the Lord, who answered them.***

God spoke to them out of the pillar of cloud* ***They kept the Lord's testimonies and all the decrees of God.***

Proclaim the greatness of the Lord God* ***O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.***

2 Peter 1:13-21

I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to refresh your memory, since I know that my death will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Hymn 693 Just as I am without one plea Vv. 1, 2 & 5

Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidd'st me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt;
Fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, thy love unknown has broken every barrier down;
Now to be thine, yea, thine alone, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxA0TFe3-Uo>

Luke 9:28-36

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" —not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

Shine On -- Transfiguration B

"His face shone like the sun;" Matthew says, "and his garments became white as light." Moses and Elijah were talking to him. There was a bright cloud overshadowing him and out of it a voice saying, "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." The three disciples who witnessed the scene "fell on their faces, and were filled with awe" (Matthew 17:1-6). At Chautauqua last summer, we were filled with awe by the stories of Fr. Gregory Boyle, the Jesuit Priest who founded Homeboy Industries. He was the chaplain for one of the weeks.

According to their webpage, Homeboy Industries provides hope, training, and support to formerly gang-involved and previously incarcerated men and women allowing them to redirect their lives and become contributing members of our community. Each year over 10,000 former gang members from across Los Angeles come through Homeboy Industries' doors in an effort to make a positive change in their lives. They are welcomed into a community of mutual kinship, love, and a wide variety of services ranging from tattoo removal to anger management and parenting classes. Full-time employment is offered for more than 200 women and men at a time through an 18-month program that helps them re-identify who they are in the world, offers job training so they can move on from Homeboy Industries and become contributing members of the community.

Fr. G. was awarded the Medal of Freedom, our highest civilian honor this year for his work. He founded Homeboy and oversees much of its activity. He told us many stories of the horrors of the lives of the people he works with, and the miraculous transformations they undergo. One of the basic central tasks is to get the Homies to think they might be worthy of transformation, that they themselves are the beloved sons and daughters of God, with whom God could possibly be well pleased. As with so many things, the ability to envision change precedes the achievement of change. So too all of us, can realize our place in the Circle of Life

when we accept that each of us too is beloved of God; with whom God is well pleased. Thereby we too can become filled with awe.

It is as strange a scene as there is in the Gospels. Even without the voice from the cloud to explain it, they had no doubt what they were witnessing. It was Jesus of Nazareth all right, the man they'd tramped many a dusty mile with, whose mother and brothers they knew, the one they'd seen as hungry, tired, and footsore as the rest of them. But it was also the one they thought of as Messiah, the Christ in all his glory. It was the holiness of the man shining through his humanness, his face so afire with it they were almost blinded.

Even with us something like that happens once in a while. The face of a man walking with his child in the park, of a woman baking bread or holding her baby, of sometimes even the unlikeliest person listening to a concert, say, or standing barefoot in the sand watching the waves roll in, or just having a beer at a baseball game in August. Every so often, something so touching, so incandescent, so alive transfigures the human face that it's almost beyond bearing.

In Christian teachings, the Transfiguration is a pivotal moment; the setting on the mountain is presented as the point where human nature meets God, the meeting place for the temporal and the eternal, with Jesus himself as the connecting point, acting as the bridge between heaven and earth.

“Don’t tell anyone the vision (*horama*)” until after the resurrection. *Horama* is used 11 times in the New Testament, all but this one in Acts, and all are referring to a supernatural experience imparting information or instructions not available in any other way. From his Second Letter, we see how Peter must have understood the experience of awakening to the presence and pleasedness of God within us. This way, he asserts, they were privileged to be eyewitnesses of his glory.” Jesus did not change. His true identity was dramatically revealed to them. And this

revelation, whether by vision or some other means, is the beginning of the transformation of all who choose to follow him.

The Transfiguration also echoes the teaching by Jesus that God is not "God of the dead, but of the living". Although Moses had died and Elijah had been taken up to heaven centuries before, they now live in the presence of the Son of God, implying that the same return to life can apply to all who face death and have faith. We too can know the same truth – that we are beloved children – and that truth will set us free from whatever gangs we are parts of, and we too will be filled with awe. This change will be frightening, because such freedom is so unfamiliar; why awe-ful is a word used for God, and then becomes awful, as in bad.

That to be changed is an unfamiliar, frightening, and therefore bad thing to do, is the fundamental untruth of the human condition; the lie that keeps us enslaved. But if we cooperate with the central force of nature, the power we call God, or Love, in re-establishing our true frame of reference, we will reclaim the language to describe it, and know that to be filled with awe – to be awe-ful is a very good thing indeed.

The presence of the prophets next to Jesus and the perceptions of the disciples have been subject to theological debate. Origen was the first to comment that the presence of Moses and Elijah represented the "Law and the Prophets", effectively referring to the Torah or the Pentateuch. Martin Luther continued to see them as the Law and the Prophets respectively, and their recognition of and conversation with Jesus as a symbol of how Jesus fulfils that law and those prophets.

The stories of our faith history – often called our salvation history -- enable us to contextualize and legitimize the stories we want to tell now. Today's readings are a perfect example. If we would incontrovertibly establish Jesus as the totality of the law and the prophets, we would do best by showing how he embodies the greatest attributes of the greatest heroes of the faith. Moses represents the law – and Jesus is shining just like him; Elijah being

the quintessential prophet, Jesus will be whooshed up into heaven like him.

So we get this great scene on the mountaintop, where the observing disciples see Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah and we know that he has all the attributes of the two of them combined; he represents the culmination of their story, and so is taking over from them. As is so often the case, baseball provides a tasty analogy: Moses is the starting pitcher, laying down the law for the people and defeating their enemies, but he doesn't go all the way. Elijah, the manager, foresees that will happen; he has the entire confidence of the people in the owner's box. The two of them are out there at the top of the ninth, also known as "these latter days," they're out there -- on the mound -- (aka Mount Hermon) conferring, and they hand the ball to Jesus, the true reliever, the closer. Immediately, or 'straightway,' as the King James version so perfectly puts it, Luke has Jesus demonstrating his nature by defeating a nasty demon with a mere rebuke. Whereas all other scriptural heroes suit their actions to their words, in Jesus, the action is the word, and God's Word – Jesus' very self – is God's action. Jesus says not to tell anybody about it – but to show them instead.

Luke's literary touch is especially deft: although we talk about today's feast as "The Transfiguration of Jesus," because the other two synoptic Gospels say he was transfigured (*metamorphoo* in the Greek), Luke describes the scene thusly: "...the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white...Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him." In other words, Jesus did not change, rather it was how he appeared to them. His true identity became apparent to them because they stayed awake. Such a revelation, whether by vision or some other means, is the beginning of the transformation of all who choose to follow him.

No wonder good old Peter wanted to put up some all- weather shelters and preserve the moment permanently. It's something we

have been doing ever since. But notice Jesus does not permit it. Instead he goes back to the work of healing. If we are transformed or metamorphoosed, even if we start to shine, yea and our garments do glisten, if we begin to be changed by our encounters with the living God, we too will appear different. And we too must resist the temptation to merely preserve the awareness of glory and awe, and instead get awe-full ourselves and employ this power for the work of healing; get out and get on with the job of rebuking unclean spirits, ourselves, while life and voice shall last.

Hymn 671 Amazing grace!

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!

The Lord has promised good to me, his word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come;
'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun,
We'll no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NG0vH4WYChQ>

The Mystery

I was not; now I am—a few days hence
I shall not be; I fain would look before
And after, but can neither do; some Power
Or lack of power says “no” to all I would.
I stand upon a wide and sunless plain,
Nor chart nor steel to guide my steps aright.
Whene’er, o’ercoming fear, I dare to move,
I grope without direction and by chance.
Some feign to hear a voice and feel a hand
That draws them ever upward thro’ the gloom.
But I—I hear no voice and touch no hand,
Tho’ oft thro’ silence infinite I list,
And strain my hearing to supernal sounds;
Tho’ oft thro’ fateful darkness do I reach,
And stretch my hand to find that other hand.
I question of th’ eternal bending skies
That seem to neighbor with the novice earth;
But they roll on, and daily shut their eyes
On me, as I one day shall do on them,
And tell me not the secret that I ask.

Paul Laurence Dunbar