

The Feast of the Transfiguration C

There are more and more applications becoming available for smart phones and tablets that make it possible for those in the congregation to download the service leaflet and follow along electronically. Initially, this sounds like a great idea. We'd certainly save a lot of trees by printing fewer leaflets. Members of the congregation could look a day or two ahead and maybe even read the assigned passages before services. And we wouldn't have yet more paper to add to the piles of paper that are eventually thrown out. No more juggling of books. Everything we would need for a Sunday morning service would be right there on our iPads and other tablets.

We could live-stream the services – we'll probably start that up this year – and those that couldn't or wouldn't make it in to services could watch us on their computers, tablets, or phone, and, in some cases, their TVs.

How many of you have your smartphones with you? Anyone have their iPad or other tablet? Phones make up the majority of the technological population in this gathering, second in number only to the human beings.

Some of us bring our phones with us wherever we go, including into church. It gets kind of boring sometimes and it certainly can't hurt to check our text messages and email and facebook postings and tweets. It's certainly going to be more interesting than listening and participating; of course, we won't be too obvious and will answer whatever message we see if we deem it important enough or interesting enough or funny enough.

It doesn't stop here on Sundays, we know. Go to any restaurant and look at the number of people checking their phones. It's much easier than trying to make face to face conversation or dealing with face to face silence. We have our phones with us in meetings. How many times has the phone rung and the person for whom it's ringing looks at the screen and decides whether or not to respond to the phone. Sometimes he'll say, "Oh, I need to take this" and gets up and leaves the room, or sometimes she'll just look at the little screen and make a decision to not answer --- either way, has been interrupted because of our insistence that our phones accompany us wherever we might be.

Nothing is as important as that which comes to us through cyberspace.

But back to our printed, paper-based leaflet... There's only so much printed on those few pages and you can only read it so many times before you look elsewhere for something else to look at someone else to talk to. Were the service leaflets on our smart devices, we could do a little surfing or even work once we're done reading. It would warm a priest's heart to walk into church just before the beginning of the service and see everyone's head bowed and hear very little talking. Wouldn't it be nice to think the congregation was actually praying and having silent time before the service begins...

I wonder how Jesus and Moses would have dealt with their 40 days in the desert and their face-to-face meetings with God had they had smart phones and tablets. I suspect there wouldn't be uninterrupted praying and meditating and just being present with God. Moses would be making lists of what needed to be done once he got back down the mountain and, in between, he'd be recording God's Commandments on his tablet so he could immediately communicate each one of the ten as he received them. That would have kept his people busy enough that they might not have had time to build a golden calf. In fact, the whole story of the exodus out of Egypt might have taken a significantly different path. And imagine the pictures Moses could have taken and sent as he was in God's presence.

It could have been something similar with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. There could have been some real-time other-dimensional texting that brought them together to the mountaintop. They knew why they were there, but Peter wasn't in the loop so he thought it would be great to build them some little huts. But it didn't quite work that way. They didn't need huts; Moses and Elisha had just stopped by to make an appearance and say hi to Jesus. They were gone before Peter knew it. But knowing Jesus a little better than Moses, we can speculate that he probably turned off his phone and left it under a bush and continued into the desert to spend time with his Father.

According to the two transfiguration stories, Moses and Jesus went to the mountaintop alone ultimately to be with God and to listen to God. Peter and John and James went with him and saw Elijah and Moses, but ultimately Jesus went on a little farther to be present with God and spent the remainder of his 40 days with his Father. Of course, on his way back, he picked up his phone and his three friends were a little annoyed that they couldn't reach him. After all, that's why we have this technology – to reach one another as quickly and conveniently as possible. But if the individual on the receiving end doesn't respond immediately, then we tend to get our little noises out of joint.

These are the kinds of things I thought about as I thought about Lent and the offerings we will have to help us in our spiritual deepening and in our reflection and self-examination and whatever spiritual disciplines in which we might engage. But it's so difficult to find time during the week to put our phones and tablets aside and take time to be present with God only. We might be able to find a half hour, but not be able to have our phones? What if someone needed to speak to us? On the other hand, what if God needed to speak with us? Would we have the time to listen? Not even for forty full days. Maybe just a half hour a day. Could we do that without phones or tablets? Perhaps more accurately, the question might be do we want to do that without phones or tablets? Even one more step – do we want to do that at all? Spending time with God can be uncomfortable for some of us.

But that's what we're being asked to do. To transform our lives during this Lenten period so that spending time with God and listening to God becomes an important meeting every day. One that cannot be interrupted. This kind of meeting has the potential for a true transformation of life. Maybe our faces won't shine brightly as did the faces of Jesus and Moses. Maybe they will – or maybe we will shine in other ways such that people will know something is different. Or maybe we will shine only inside but we will know something is different – something about us has been transformed.

I can ask why wouldn't we do this? Of what are we afraid? And the answers would come back, "It has nothing to do with being afraid, I just have way too much on my plate" or "I'm just too busy to add one more thing" or "If I do this, I'll have to take time away from something else." In other words, what's currently happening in our lives is more important than spending a little time to reconnect with our Creator and with the one who is on his way to die for us.

Please don't deny yourselves this opportunity for a little transformation – for a little peace in your lives. We've included small devotional booklets in each service leaflet – and there's one even for families. But we also have more opportunities to re-direct our lives – a weekly video series, the presence of a spiritual director in residence and all she can bring to us over 8 days, a 40-day journey of reflection with Joan Chittister, a well-known figure of spirituality over the past 40 years or so, and an open church where you can come and sit in silence or in prayer.

We'll have to slow down a little to do these kinds of quiet activities. But that's what Lent's about. I think we sometimes think Moses and Jesus could do what they did because they really weren't as busy as we are. I suspect that would be an inaccurate assumption on our part. Moses was the leader of thousands of very cranky and unhappy people who had no idea where he was leading them. And Jesus was a type of motivational speaker who had an incredibly busy schedule and still needed to find time for healing people and performing miracles. He didn't even have a normal lifetime to do these things – for him time was running out quickly. But they both found time to be present with God and it transformed them. We need to find time to be present with God and open ourselves up to a holy transformation. It can happen even without our cell phones and tablets and the social media. We can put our technology down, and focus on the one who is more important than any tweet or text message. All we need is that one-on-one time – uninterrupted – with God.

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