

Homily August 6, 2017 Transfiguration

In a recent bulletin article on Sacred Scripture I noted that we have a portion of those scriptures in common with our Jewish brothers and sisters. What we call the Old Testament is their entire Sacred Scriptures. They tell the story of the history of God's people up to about the time of the Roman empire. While it is a history we have in common, our viewpoint of those sacred scriptures is very different. We as Catholics and Christians regard the sacred scriptures of our spiritual ancestors to be directed to the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. The Old Testament is preparation for the New Testament.

The way that the Church makes use of sacred scriptures in the Mass builds on this truth. I am not sure that Catholics fully appreciate the breadth of the sacred scriptures that is laid out for them as together we listen from Sunday to Sunday during the liturgy of the Word. Each year most of the Gospel readings will come from one of the three similarly written Gospels. They are Matthew, Mark and Luke and are read in three successive years. John's Gospel is sprinkled among the three years.

For most of the year our first reading is taken from the Old Testament and is specifically chosen because it has some relationship to the Gospel. We are reminded over and over again of the integral connection between the Old and New Testament. The second reading moves successively through one of the New Testament writings which describe the Church that sprung from the mission of Jesus, and her teaching.

Today's feast of the Transfiguration does not typically fall on a Sunday. So the selection of three specific readings all the more shows the development from Old Testament, through the words and works of Jesus in the Gospels to its fruitful expression in the apostolic Church described in other New Testament writings.

Today's first reading is a portion of a vision of Daniel set some 500 years before Jesus. It describes a leader that God has called forth, who appears in human form and is given dominion over all. He is described as one like a *Son of Man*. In the latter years of Judaism before the time of Christ that title (and the person identified in today's reading) was considered the future Messiah. And the longing and expectation of a unique and powerful God-chosen leader who will deliver the people from misfortune runs throughout the later prophetic writings of the Old Testament.

In the Gospel description of the transfiguration of Jesus we learn that Jesus was One with the Heavenly Father and was the fulfillment of the old law as symbolized by the presence of Moses and Elijah, representing the law and prophets, the heart

of Jewish faith and practice. The special manifestation of the divinity of Jesus was an affirmation of the credibility of Him and His message and was intended to strengthen the select group of apostles for the dark day of Jesus' crucifixion. And the message that the heavenly Father had in announcing the presence of His Son was that people should listen to Him.

In our second reading St. Peter, toward the end of his life, referred back to the transfiguration in relationship to the credibility of Jesus' message, a credibility further demonstrated in the resurrection. And because of Jesus' credibility Peter reminded the people of the Church to live virtuous lives because Jesus really was going to return to take His true followers, His persevering disciples, into the place of His eternal dominion in heaven.

The message of Peter in the first century is intended for us as well. We should listen to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We should be attentive to all that He has called us to do as we await the fulfillment of His promise. And what we are called to do is live faithful lives that affirm the credibility of the mission and message of Jesus Christ. It is the message of redemption, forgiveness, transformation of disciples so that they can transform the world. And we have ample material to guide us as to what Jesus has said. We have the Sacred Scriptures themselves. We have the teaching of the Church. We have nearly 2000 years of spiritual writings from those who have gone before us.

Of course listening and being attentive is only the first step. We also have to act to do good and avoid evil. That is not always easy. Maybe we think we might do better if we could have an experience like the transfiguration. But the transfiguration alone did not prevent the three apostles from future doubt. Even after the encounters with the resurrected Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit the apostles would find their strength in the continued attentive to Jesus' word and their encounters with Him in their Eucharist. The work of the apostles was founded on a current and active faith and grace, not a mere memory.

We too are to seek out the opportunities when we can encounter the divine Jesus, the Jesus first transfigured on the mountain who constantly manifests His divine presence under the material appearance of mere bread. The encounters with Jesus in prayer, worship and sacrament strengthen us to do good and avoid evil. And along the way we experience manifestation of Jesus' divine power when we resist an evil. They might be the times we surprise ourselves when the urge to say something uncharitable is checked and we notice the power of Jesus at work in us. Sometimes it is the manifestation of divine power when we

surprise ourselves by stepping beyond our self imposed limitations to help another. It is in these that the transfigured Jesus transforms us so that we can be part of the transformation of the world to one in which more people are attentive and listening to Jesus.