

HOMILY ~ THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

AUGUST 5/6, 2023

When I was ordained 1 ½ years, I was assigned to St. Agatha Parish because the pastor went on a leave of absence. Downtown told me to just go there and be with the people. The day I started my assignment, the bookkeeper told me that she had a lot of bills that she could not pay; and she was afraid they were going to turn off the utilities. So, I called downtown. I told them what the bookkeeper told me and asked them what they wanted me to do. They said, *"We are not going to give you any money."* I said, *"That really does not answer my question. What do you want me to do with the bills?"* They said, *"We are not going to give you any money."* It was very clear to me that they were not going to help me. The next morning I got up and prayed as usual. I had an overwhelming sense of God's presence that is difficult for me to describe. It was a kind of warm, glowing energy that gave me a sense of total peace. I wanted to stay there, but I had to go celebrate Mass. The next morning I thought, God is with me. I just have to stay there in prayer, and God will tell me what to do. I kept getting up earlier and earlier to pray. I had the overwhelming sense of God's presence each morning, but no answers. Pretty soon, I was spending three hours in prayer in the morning with no answers. I was meeting with the people of the parish every day. They were really good people. After a couple of weeks, I thought God is going to be with me and help us; but maybe I need to figure this out with the people with God's help. That overwhelming sense of God's presence went away, and I figured it out with the people and with God. Eight months later, we had a big celebration of the parish and the final Mass and closed.

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration. Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain; and he was transfigured before them with Elijah and Moses. They thought it was good to be there and wanted to stay. They heard a voice say, *"This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."* With that, Jesus was alone and normal in appearance. Up until his point, Jesus was teaching and preaching and that was all good; but now they knew that Jesus was divine, and they needed to continue to follow him. God never told them what to do other than to listen to Jesus. I think we still have these Transfiguration experiences to remind us that Jesus is divine, and he will be with us; but we need to figure it out as we go along.

The prayer experiences that I had at St. Agatha were my Transfiguration experiences. They told me that Jesus would be with me, and Jesus is very powerful; but I had to figure it out with God's help. That is so typical of how Jesus interacts with people in the Gospels. Did you ever notice that Jesus rarely gives anyone a straight answer? He likes

to give an answer that makes you think, but he does not really answer the question asked. He likes to answer a question with another question. He likes to answer by telling us a parable. Jesus is always teaching. This helps us, but he does not directly tell us what to do. He frequently does not directly answer our questions, just like he never answered my questions at St. Agatha.

Do you need to go to a mountain to have one of these mountain top experiences? It does not have to be a mountain, but it does need to be a quiet undistracted time where you are open to seeing the Transfiguration. You cannot create the Transfiguration experience because it comes from God, but you can be open to it. That is why quiet personal prayer is so important. Jesus may be trying to reveal himself to us, but we are not paying any attention. The rectory was my mountain top at St. Agatha. Summer is vacation time and that gets us out of our routines, and maybe you need to carve out some quiet time with the Lord. I spent a few days with a group of friends last week on Lake Huron. I got up every morning at 5:45 and watched the sunrise alone. I felt incredibly close to God during these times. You have to find your mountain top. I was talking to a young mother a while ago who told me that the only time everyone leaves her alone is when she is in the bathroom. Maybe that is your mountaintop.

I frequently say that you need to listen in prayer, and people ask me what exactly does this look like. I have never heard voices and have never seen visions. This is possible, but I have never experienced this. It is sometimes an overwhelming sense of God's presence, like how I felt at St. Agatha; but quite honestly, I have not experienced that in many years. I think God give us these experiences when we need them. Regardless of what is going on, when I pray each morning, I almost always get a sense of great peace; and I know I will be able to work through whatever the day brings. I have no anxiety after my prayer time is finished. Sometimes I have moments of clarity when I know exactly what to do, and this does not come from a logical rational thought process. It is just there. So be open to these mountaintop experiences. My morning prayer time has absolutely changed my life. It can change yours.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim