

FROM THE PASTOR'S



Transfiguration of the Lord, August 6, 2006 B

THE TRANSFIGURATION - AN EXPERIENCE OF THE ALL HOLY GOD

Annually we celebrate the Fest of the Transfiguration on August 6th. When that date falls on a Sunday, it is given precedence over whatever Sunday in Ordinary Time that falls on the date—this year the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

The Feast of the Transfiguration celebrates that awesome moment in time when Peter, James and John had a spiritual mountain top experience that they would never forget and could never adequately explain. They caught a glimpse of Jesus in all his glory—a foretaste of the resurrected Christ.

In the Old Testament scriptures such experiences were called ‘theophanies’ - experiences during which God appeared to certain individuals. Some of the most famous Old Testament theophanies have to do with Moses. In Exodus 3, we have the account of God calling Moses to be his liberator for his enslaved people. God appears to Moses in a burning bush. In Exodus 19, we read about Moses’ encounter with God on Mount Sinai during which God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. During that particular theophany, God pulls out his best fireworks. This is how the authors of the book of Exodus describes the Sinai event. *“Now at daybreak on the third day, there were peals of thunder on the mountain and lighting flashes, a dense cloud and a loud trumpet blast. . . The mountain of Sinai was entirely wrapped in smoke, because God had descended on it in the form of fire. Like smoke from a furnace the smoke went up, and the whole mountain shook violently. Louder and louder grew the sound of the trumpet. Moses spoke and God answered him with peals of thunder . . . (19:16-19)”*

The call of the prophet Isaiah is another famous theophany. In Isaiah 6:1-8, Isaiah describes his call or theophany, his experience of God.

In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, with the train of his garment filling the temple.

Seraphim were stationed above; each of them had six wings: with two they veiled their faces, with two they veiled their feet, and with two they hovered aloft.

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!” they cried one to the other. “All the earth is filled with his glory!”

At the sound of that cry, the frame of the door shook

and the house was filled with smoke.

Then I said, “Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!”

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, holding an ember which he had taken with tongs from the altar.

He touched my mouth with it. “See,” he said. “now that this has touched your lips, your wickedness is removed, your sin purged.”

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” “Here I am;” I said; “send me!”

In spiritual literature, experiences like those of Moses, Isaiah, Peter, James and John are sometimes referred to as “experiences of the Holy”. During such awe-filled experiences individuals can be overfilled with joy (Peter said “let’s build some booths here”. He didn’t want to let go of his wonderful experience of the glory of God as seen in Jesus) or such an experience can be terrifying—sometimes called “holy terror” - which leads me to a deep sense of one’s *unholiness* or sinfulness in the presence of God’s holiness. Isaiah certainly felt this in the presence of God. “I am a man of unclean lips.” Peter had a similar experience after Jesus helped him have a huge catch of fish. He said “depart from me O Lord for I am a sinful man.

Sometimes what we most deeply desire e.g. a close relationship with God may also most deeply terrify us. We fear losing ourselves to God. We may also experience this in human relationships. On the one hand we desire a close intimate relationship with another. On the other hand we hold back fearing a loss of self. When Moses saw the burning bush he was attracted by it and yet fearful of it.

Everyday Epiphonies/Theophanies

Few of us will ever have experiences like Moses or Isaiah, or like Peter, James or John on Mt. Tabor, but we may have lesser and yet very powerful spiritual experiences that may transfigure our lives in very significant ways.

Thomas Merton had been a Trappist monk for 17 years before he had a “wake-up” experience that transformed his understanding of what it means to be a human being. In the center of the shopping district of downtown

Louisville, Merton suddenly saw that he loved and belonged to all the ordinary people walking around him. In *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Merton writes of his conviction that each person is a reflection of an incarnate God. "And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun."

Many people who attend a CRHP retreat have a life changing experience. Our guest speaker today, Sr. Melanie, wrote a book some year ago called: *Everyday Epiphanies*. The following are two stories from that book.

On my way home from the meeting, I decided to stop in to see Mom and Dad. It's a cold, dark November evening. Supper time. As I pull into the driveway, I see lights on in the kitchen. Through the window I spot Dad in his red plaid flannel shirt, sitting at the table with his newspaper. Mom, aproned, is standing by the stove stirring something—homemade leek soup, perhaps. Dad, catching sight of me through the window, smiles and stands up stiffly and slightly stooped. As I step up onto the back porch, Dad opens the door wide and announces cheerfully, "Well, look who's here!" And I step into the warmth of that kitchen and into the warmth of their embraces.

That's what it's going to be like when I die and enter heaven. It will be like stepping out of the cold and darkness, into the warmth and brightness of a homey kitchen, with Mom and Dad there waiting for me. And they will both smile when they see me and open wide their arms. And Dad will announce cheerfully, "Well, look who's here!"

God, may I keep before myself a clear, strong image of entering heaven.

Sister Rose is a chaplain at a children's hospital. Every day she ministers to sick and dying children and their families. In the morning she hold the hand of Troy, a four-year-old swathed in bandages in the burn unit. "He's not going to make it," a nurse whispers to her as she leaves the unit.

At noon she feeds a bottle to Justin, an eight-month-old with AIDS, staying long enough to rock him to sleep. This afternoon she cradles a sobbing mother, Carmelita, whose ten-year-old daughter has just been diagnosed with leukemia. And right before leaving, she helps two stunned parents with the funeral arrangements for their daughter, age five, who ran out in front of a car.

And when Sister Rose comes home tonight, one of us greets her with. "You're late." Another one complains. "The coffee maker's not working again." And the third

one asks, "Isn't this rain depressing?"

God, help me to keep things in perspective today.

Private Revelations/Visions

Down through the centuries members of the faithful have had visions and private revelations from God, Jesus and Mary. Many of these have been written about e.g. The Dialogues of St. Catherine of Siena. The church teaches that divine revelation ended with Jesus. So there is nothing new in the visions or private revelations received by priests, sisters or lay people. Rather such visions or revelations may be a reminder to us of aspects of the gospel that we may not be paying attention to. When people state that they are having visions from on high, the church sets up a commission to investigate them. If the church issues approval of the visions (e.g. Lourdes, Fatima) the approval is always issued in the negative i.e. the church will state that there is nothing harmful or contrary to the faith in a particular vision.

As most of you know, the vision or apparitions of Medjugorje have been investigated for many years. You may have seen in last week's Florida Catholic that the local bishop of Medjugorje has asked that the visionaries to stop claiming that Mary has been visiting them for 25 years. The bishop stated that the church "has not accepted either as supernatural or as Marian, any of the apparitions." Bishop Peric of Mostar-Duvno states:

"As the local bishop, I maintain that regarding the events of Medjugorje, on the basis of the investigations and experience gained thus far throughout these last 25 years, the church has not confirmed a single apparition as authentically being the Madonna," he said. He then called on the alleged visionaries and "those persons behind the message to demonstrate ecclesiastical obedience and to cease with these public manifestations and messages in this parish."

"In this fashion they shall show their necessary adherence to the church, by placing neither private apparitions nor private sayings before the official position of the church," he said.

"Our faith is a serious and responsible matter," he added. "The church is also a serious and responsible institution."

The bishop made his comments June 15 during a homily at a confirmation Mass in Medjugorje's St. James Church.

He also warned his audience of a schism emerging in the region between the church and more than a dozen Franciscan brothers and priests who have been expelled by the generalate of the Order of Friars Minor in Rome because of their disobedience to the pope.

He said that the expelled Franciscans "have not only been illegally active in these parishes, but they have also

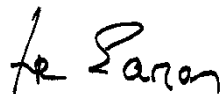
administered the sacraments profanely . . . Or they have assisted at invalid marriages.”

Throughout the 1980's, Franciscan Father Jozo Zovko acted as “spiritual adviser” to the visionaries.

But three church commissions failed to find evidence to support their claims, and in 1991 the bishops of the former Yugoslavia declared that “it cannot be affirmed that these matters concern supernatural apparitions or revelations.”

A short while later Father Zovko was stripped of his faculties to exercise any priestly functions by Bishop Zanic in a decree upheld by Bishop Peric.

Have a blessed week,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Le Saran". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized.