

Homily for the Feast of the Transfiguration - 2023.

Jesus is for real. He does not pretend to be God for he is truly the Incarnate Son of God. He does not pretend to be human for he is True Man. As is so beautifully said in the Divine Praises recited at Benediction: *“Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true man”*. His divinity, however, is concealed behind his humanity. So, all people, and even his own disciples, thought (and many still think) he was (and is) just human. This is the Mystery of the Incarnation that we cannot fully comprehend.

St. Leo the Great explains this in simple terms saying that Jesus: *“stooped down to take up our lowliness without loss to His own glory. He remained what He was; He took up what He was not. He wanted to join the very nature of a servant to that nature in which He is equal to God the Father. He wanted to unite both natures in an alliance so wonderful that the glory of the greater would not annihilate the lesser, nor the taking up of the lower diminish the greatness of the higher.”* (Sermon No 1 on the Nativity of the Saviour.)

St. Paul also describes this beautifully in his Letter to the Philippians, saying of Jesus: *“Though He was in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross”* (Phil 2:6-11).

Clearly, then, Jesus became man in order to redeem mankind through His suffering and death. Assuming our human nature gave Him the capacity to suffer, and thereby save us all. But it did not take away His divine nature. True man, true God. However, He could not fully reveal this truth before He undergoes the Paschal Mystery – His passion, death and resurrection. Therefore, while on the way to Jerusalem where all this would take place, Jesus was concerned that His followers could not endure the scandal of the cross and abandon Him and His mission. Hence, His Transfiguration had to happen. St Bede the venerable puts it this way saying that our Lord: *“in a loving concession allowed Peter, James and John to enjoy for a very short time the*

contemplation of the happiness that lasts forever, so as to enable them to bear adversity with greater fortitude.” (St. Bede, Commentary on St. Mark, 8, 30:1,3).

Jesus does not change in any way. His changed appearance is only in the eyes of his three disciples. In just a flash, but seemingly an eternity to them, he opened their eyes to that infinitely profound reality – that He is God! They had a glimpse of Jesus as God – *“His face shone like the sun and His clothes became white as light”* (Mt 17:2). And consequently they had an indescribable experience of heaven. Groping for the right words, Peter exclaimed, *“Master, it is good for us to be here!”*

This profound experience never left the consciousness of Peter. In his second epistle he writes: *“For He received honour and glory from God the Father when that unique declaration came to Him from the majestic glory, ‘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”* (2 Peter 1:17-18).

The Transfiguration event empowered the disciples to face the shame and pain of the cross and later on, to proclaim the message of the resurrection. St. Leo the Great makes this apt conclusion: *“The principal aim of the Transfiguration was to banish from the disciples’ souls the scandal of the Cross.”* (Sermon, 51,3).

We all wish to follow Jesus. But following him will invariably lead us to the Way of the Cross. He makes that very clear to all: *“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”* (Mt. 16:24). Christian discipleship is never easy. There are times when the cross seems too heavy, and the prospect of more sufferings ahead terrifies us.

The lesson of the Transfiguration should help us move on, and follow Jesus without fear, weariness and regret. As what the three disciples ultimately realised is, that there is definitely a certain assurance that everything eventually turns out fine. It is like reading a novel where the happy ending is already known to us. No matter how difficult the problems that the main character encounters, we are not disheartened and continue reading because we know the story is sure to have a happy ending.

At the Last Supper, Jesus left us an indelible memorial, the Eucharist, the Holy Mass. It is the sacrament of his Real Presence, thereby fulfilling His promise: *“I am with you always until the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:20)

No matter what happens, he is always with us, especially in the Eucharist.

Should we open our eyes of faith, just as the three disciples on the mountain did, we too, this very day, can and will experience what St. Gregory the Great proclaims when he says: *“The Liturgy is primarily a sacred act before God, which means that at the hour of Sacrifice, in response to the priest’s acclamation, the heavens open up; the choirs of angels are witnessing this Mystery; what is above and what is below unite; heaven and earth are united, matters visible and invisible become united”* (Dial. IV, 60). Is this not a Transfiguration experience?

The Mass is accurately called “Heaven on Earth.” Heaven is the state of being in union with God. If we believe that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist, it means, therefore, that the Mass is the experience of heaven on earth. How deeply do we cherish and appreciate those priceless moments while we are present in Holy Mass?

Dear People, Jesus is truly present in our sacred celebration. Heaven begins right here! Today at the elevation of the sacred Host and then at the elevation of the saving Chalice, remember and say to yourself St Peter’s profession of faith on the holy Mountain: “Lord, it’s good for us to be here.”