

“True Identity”

Today's Holy Gospel is about a most extraordinary event - the Transfiguration. Wait a minute – what is the transfiguration? Isn't that what the Roman Catholics think about... no that is transubstantiation? The transfiguration – “trans” meaning across or to change – and figure refers to the face, the image, the being. Transfiguration - the “remarkable transformation that once took place in the appearance of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Three of the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, all mention the Transfiguration and so the obvious question to ask is: “Why did this event take place?”

Let's look at the background to this story. In Luke Chapters 8 and 9, the main issue of those chapters is: Who is Jesus? This is asked three times in these two chapters.

- Jesus has just walked on the water and calmed the raging storm. And in Luke 8:25 the disciples ask the question: “*Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.*”
- In Luke 9:7-9 Jesus and his disciples had been performing marvelous miracles – driving out demons and curing the sick and this comes to the attention of the local ruler Herod the Tetrarch. St. Luke records Herod saying: “*I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?*”
- And then in Luke 9:18-20. Jesus is alone with His disciples at prayer and asks them this question: “*Who do the crowds say I am?*”
They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “The Messiah of God.” That is why today's Holy Gospel begins strangely with the words “*About eight days after Jesus said this...*” I know some of you might have been thinking about this – why would the Gospel begin with this – and that is why I wanted to share with you what led up to this.

I believe that in today's Holy Gospel, God wanted to answer this question once and for all with the simple and clear words: let's turn in our Pew Bibles to page 1612 – verse 35, God the Father speaks saying “*This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him!*” (Luke 9:35) You heard me talking with the children about this. Jesus took His three most trusted disciples - Peter, James and John to a mountain – which I believe to be Mount Hermon – right near Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus asked the two questions about who the crowd says that He is and who do they say that He is. It was right near the temple of Pan, a really pagan place - Jesus asked the question and Peter proclaimed the truth that He was Jesus the Christ, the Messiah – the Son of the Living God.

At the Transfiguration, **three significant events occurred:**

- Jesus' human bodily appearance changed, it was transformed.
- Moses and Elijah appeared with him on the mountain and

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- God the Father audibly spoke to the disciples

The Scripture tells us in verses 28 and 29 “*as He was praying, the appearance of His face changed, and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.*” (Luke 9:28-29)

A great many words have been said about who Jesus is, but now God the Father, Himself, reveals to all mankind, something very visual about who Jesus is; His eternal glory. God the Father gives the three disciples clear visual evidence of who Jesus truly is. He shows them the Glory of His Christ; the glory of the Son of God. He shows them Jesus transfigured; bathed in dazzling white. In today’s Old Testament lesson taken from the Book of Exodus – we read how Moses witnessed the Glory of God – and because of it – his face was absolutely shining, it was radiant! Just being near His glory was enough to cause Moses to glow and wear a veil before others.

Luke’s Gospel also tells us of the heavenly visitors; look at verses 30 and 31: “*Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about His departure, which He was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.*” (Luke 9:30-31) Pretty amazing!

The Greek word used for Jesus’ departure that they were talking about is ἔξοδον (exodon) and you might recognize that from it we get the word “Exodus.” That indeed is tying it together with the reading that we had today. In the Gospels, there are important reminders for us of the first Exodus when Moses brought the children of Israel out of the slavery of Egypt. And that Exodus was remembered each year by the killing of a Passover Lamb. The new Exodus – the freeing of God’s people from the slavery of sin - would come with Jesus’ death on the Cross and his resurrection in Jerusalem, so that we might be saved by the Blood of the Lamb. I think it is pretty clear that Jesus is the Passover Lamb of the New Exodus. In just a few moments after the consecration I will break the Host and proclaim “alleluia, Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” and your response is “therefore let us keep the feast, Alleluia.” (Remember on Wednesday and the weeks to come during Lent – we have to put away our alleluias. No flowers and no alleluias, but God knows we are rejoicing in our hearts. Amazing that our Passover Lamb – the NEW Exodus points to in the Holy Scripture account of the first Exodus – and by whose precious blood we are saved.

Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets. Moses represents the Law and Elijah represents the Prophets. After God the Father has spoken, Moses and Elijah simply disappear and Jesus alone remains. You might say that the Law and the Prophets have done their purpose and so they pass away. Now, Jesus, who embodies the fulfillment of both the Law and the Prophets, remains as our sole source of salvation.

Jesus is the one who fulfills the Old Covenant and brings to us the New Covenant. On that mountain, that day, a new era was blossoming. The Old Covenant, represented by Moses and

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Elijah was going to pass away and the new Covenant was going to come, through the death and resurrection of Jesus. This new covenant of the relationship with Jesus – and the partaking in that New Covenant through His Body and Blood is the most precious gift that we, believers of who Jesus is, have been given.

Finally, Luke's Gospel says: "*While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone*" (Luke 9:34-36) God the Father simply says these words, "*This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him!*" Jesus – the only Son of God!

In the world and most certainly in the church today – the true identity of Jesus has become a somewhat divisive issue:

- Is Jesus the Son of God - that God the Father proclaimed on the mountain that day, or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus the one who required repentance for sin – and then provided forgiveness – or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus the one who sacrificed Himself – on the hard wood of the cross – willingly, so that "*whoever believes in Him – shall not perish – but have eternal life?*" Or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus someone who touched hearts and cured bodies and souls of people who have faith in Him – or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus someone who came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets – or is He someone else who turns a blind eye at the Law that His Father gave to Moses?
- Is Jesus someone who believes every word that is in the Scriptures – as the written Word of God- or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus someone who invites people to come to Him and be transformed – never to be the same again – healed of affliction, disease, addictions, perversions and sinful behavior? Or is He someone else – who says come to me and stay just as you are – have fun and forget what my Father said – that was for another time that has expired long ago?

Sadly, today there are people who identify themselves as *Christians* who cannot – or will not confess that Jesus is who God says He is. They will either say – Oh, He was a great prophet, or teacher, or even that He had great power that was used to lead us to our own divinity.

My brothers and sisters in Christ:

- You either accept the Divinity of Jesus Christ as the only Son of God – who died on the cross for the atonement of our sins – OR NOT!
- Believe in Him – and what the Bible says about Him - OR NOT!
- If you do believe in Him, then you CAN call yourself a follower of Christ or a Christian;
- and if not – then you are following a different god altogether.

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Let's face it - you either believe what the Bible says – or you don't. If you don't believe what the Bible says -- then please call yourself something other than a Christian – and start living whatever truth it is that you do believe in.

The Apostle John warns us of this kind of deception with these words from 2 John 1:7-9 “*Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist! Be on your guard, so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but may receive a full reward. Everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God; whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.*” If you have the Father and the Son – then you have the Holy Spirit!

If you believe that Jesus is who He says He is, and that God's Holy Word is true – then we leave it to Jesus and let Him and God's Word transform us to His ways – not for us to transform Jesus and Scripture to ours. There is only ONE TRUTH - God has spoken – JESUS IS HIS SON – and we are to listen to Him!