

080608 THE TRANSFIGURATION

Oh what a feast on the Church's calendar: this most glorious celebration of the Transfiguration... a provocative, magnetic glimpse of what awaits God's chosen and holy ones on the 'other side' of the veil.... In his famous document *The Summa*, Thomas Aquinas wrote that "At his Transfiguration Christ showed his disciples the splendor of his beauty, to which he will shape and color those who are his: 'He will reform our lowliness configured to the body of his glory'" (Philippians 3:21).

We could review some of the ageless themes of preachers and theologians about the meaning of this dazzling event. But please let me share a view of the Transfiguration in terms of the sacraments. That is to say that our own Transfiguration is accomplished in the here and now – in our human existence by the Sacraments. We don't see this – perhaps don't think about it... but reality is as follows. We are – each of us is transfigured by the Sacraments.

For example, at the back of this church there is a baptismal font. And a few months ago, we carried it up to the Shrine behind the church. I put a quantity of water in it and set up to do a Baptism. I blessed the water and used it to baptize a young Hispanic boy named Marco. It was a joyous occasion. Yet behind the prayers and the pouring of water and an anointing with oil – a transfiguration took place. Christ claimed the child through the ministry of the Church. And young Marco died and was born again as he became a Child of God and a full member of Christ's family on earth.

All of that happened through the actions of what started as plain tap water – water blessed and used in accord with the rubrics of the Church for this sacrament. The Lord Jesus himself affirmed the necessity of Baptism, and in the action of the water and the Holy Spirit – all Original Sin is forgiven. Truly, this Sacrament of Baptism transfigures infants and men and women. And when older people receive the sacrament, it even removes all personal sin.

Transfiguration through Baptism.

Next – consider Reconciliation. We go to Confession – each of us wounded to one degree or another in our love-relationship with God. God doesn't say, "Oh no, not you again.... When are you going to learn?" No – He who loves beyond our capabilities to understand – through the ministry of the priest, acting in Persona Christi – God restores us to the same state as Marco. We are born again.

A priest from Seattle (Fr. Phil Bloom) has spoken about the link between the mysteries found in the Eucharist and the Transfiguration. "The most obvious way in which the Transfiguration illuminates the Eucharist is that it exposes the reality beneath the appearances. Jesus temporarily relinquished his earthly appearance on that mountaintop. We hear about how even his clothes turned dazzlingly white and members of the Communion of Saints became manifest: Moses and Elijah conversed with Jesus. Fr. Bloom connected the Transfiguration to the Communion of Saints --- God's holy ones – those in Heaven waiting for us... able to talk and share about our world and what is going to happen.

And after reception of the Eucharist, we can participate in a transfiguration because the holy ones – our deceased parents and loved ones can communicate with us, as did Moses and Elijah. Imagine me being able to talk with my late mother and dad and brother. You can do this as well. AND – our venial sins are removed through the power of the Eucharist – we are truly transfigured by a worthy reception of Christ's Body and Blood.

Now, consider the beautiful, elegant, ageless ceremony in which a man has hands laid on him by his bishop and he is marked with a sign on his soul that will never be removed. This happens to priests and deacons in the sacrament of ordination or Holy Orders, as it is more commonly known. Men, transfigured in the image and likeness and calling of Christ – to give themselves completely to others. Some like Padre Pio and St. John Vianney do it nobly. Some are holy but their experience is not as demonstrative. And yes, some clergy stumble and fall – but they are transfigured none-the-less.

And for today, I'll end with the sacrament that brings man and woman into a special union and configuration. Each partner in marriage called and graced to be Christ to the spouse – and to receive the strength and participation of Christ to be able to accept this calling each and every day till death they do part. When prayerfully and sacramentally married – a transfiguration happens. Your partner becomes Christ... and you are called to be Christ to your spouse. When this is done in accord with God's will and grace, your souls shine as with the same brightness of those on Mount Tabor.

So, whether leaving a Baptism ceremony that you were a party to or a witness of... or leaving the church after Confession or reception of the Eucharist or some other sacrament... you and I can meditate upon the theme that we have been Transfigured... and we can truly say, "Lord it is good that we are here."