



From A Bishop's Journal (736)

Family- and Parish-Based Catechesis on Peace (2) "Get up and do not be Afraid"

Every second Sunday of Lent relates the story of a great event which was witnessed by a few of the Apostles, the marvel of the Transfiguration. What the Church intends to give us through this reading is a glimpse of what is to happen to each one of us at the conclusion of Lent, as well as what we are to become when at last we complete our pilgrimage on earth: transfigured beings enjoying God's peace forever.

Breaks That Are Appreciated

Who would remain indifferent to the rays of sun after a shower, a snowfall, or mist has been part of our daily fare for quite a while? What person who has had an illness does not enjoy a few moments' "vacation" from their trial, to be with family and friends? Who is the fisherman or hunter who, after waiting for hours, does not appreciate the fish at the end of his line or the deer that has come within gunshot? What person celebrating an anniversary does not enjoy the flowers and cards? Who is the soldier who does not look forward to returning home to his family? All these events "transfigure" daily routine and give a second wind to life.

A Fervent Prayer

The Prophet Isaiah has a beautiful prayer (Is. 63): "You, Lord, are our father, our redeemer you are named forever. Why do you let us wander, O Lord, from your ways, and harden our hearts so that we fear you not? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage... O that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you. Would that you might meet us going right, that we were mindful of you in our ways!... You have hidden your face from us and have delivered us up to our guilt. Yet, O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands."

Upon a High Mountain

This was an unforgettable day for Peter, James, and John. Jesus had taken them with him to a high mountain and there, before them, he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. We only have to remember staying in the woods or in the mountains, to

share in the joy of the apostles. All we need do is to remember a child's smile, a spouse's smile that brightens one's entire day. And here in the Gospel, Moses and Elijah come to Jesus and the apostles... Two extraordinary beings who left their stamp on God's people. Moses, the lawgiver who had concluded an alliance at Sinai and who had given his people the "commandments of life," commandments that would guarantee peace to all the tribes and ensure the growth of all those who had been given to his care. The ten laws were a pledge of life and survival to the entire people: to respect God and one's neighbour, beginning with one's parents; respect for truth and justice, and for all human life. These were the surest guideposts for everyone who wanted to grow, and for the whole community, too. And Elijah? What was he doing on the mountain? Was he not the prophet of the Most High? He who had confronted 450 false prophets, he who had denounced the many injustices committed throughout the Kingdom, he who had taken the defence of poor Naboth the Jezreelite who was stoned to death for his vine; and he who had encountered God in the tiny whispering sound?

Defenders of God and of the Poor

It is not surprising that at the Transfiguration Jesus appeared with Moses and Elijah, the two defenders of God and of the poor, two prophets of peace. In the wake of their teaching and their ministry of peace, Jesus, following in the footsteps of John the Baptist, had taught the beatitudes of sharing, of compassion, and of justice. A few weeks later, Jesus would seal his fate, give up his life and the mission of peace which the Father had given him. "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" Peter's excitement comes as no surprise: "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

Short-Lived Joy

"The disciples fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Get up and do not be afraid.' And when they looked up, they saw no one but Jesus himself alone." Within a few weeks, these same disciples will be in the Garden of Gethsemane, sound asleep, unable to share in the sadness and anguish of Jesus in his agony. How can we understand such a contrast? The human heart is impenetrable, the psalmist says. How can it be ecstatic in times of happiness and peace, and deaf to human distress? How can moments of reconciliation and truce change into unimaginable rage?

A Holy Vocation

Perhaps the advice that Paul gives his young disciple Timothy can give a partial answer to whomever is in search of peace: "With the strength which comes from God bear your share of the hardship which the Gospel entails." For God has saved us and has given us a holy vocation, not as a reward for our own acts, but because of His own plan and His grace. This grace has been made visible to us. Christ has shown himself by destroying death and making life and immortality resplendent through the proclamation of the Gospel.

Courage!

Christ has asked us as his disciples to be peacemakers not only in the great political arena but day by day, in our own family life, in the midst of our parish, our milieu, our country. It is then that the face of the transfigured Jesus, the transfiguring face of the entire Christian community, will shine, if only for a short while. It shall then be a day of celebration just as it was with Peter and his companions; we shall then be able to confront the hardest trials because the Transfigured Jesus can make us pass through death to life, through war to everlasting peace.

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