

## **February 22, 2015 Transfiguration Homily**

My brothers and sisters in Christ, on the third of April in the year of Our Lord 1968, a prominent Protestant minister delivered a justly famous sermon in a Memphis, Tennessee Church. Scholars today refer to it as the "I've been to the mountaintop" speech. The speaker, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., appeared to have had a mystical experience. He saw something others could not possibly see. Perhaps he had an illumination, a glimpse of a future liberation.

His congregation was spellbound. The oppressed people of color were given reason to hope for their future. "And God allowed me to go up the mountain. I've seen the promised land (of freedom)", cried the legendary orator. After the memorable sermon, Dr. King received a thunderous ovation. Regrettably, the celebrated minister could not remain on top of the mountaintop for a long stretch of time. On the following day, he was gunned down by an assassin. He was only thirty-nine years old. Oddly, Rev. King's death assured him of a more lasting glory than that of his contemporaries in the civil rights movement. His fame came only by way of the cross!

The Transfiguration of Jesus is the opening event in the second half of St. Mark's gospel. (Mk.9:2-8) Three early Disciples of Christ, Peter, James and John enjoyed the privilege of climbing a mountain with him. "There in their presence, he was transfigured" (Mk.9:2). On that mountaintop these disciples, Our Lords inner circle, were afforded a preview of the glory of the risen Jesus. Within a year's time, these men will also witness Jesus' agony on another mountain, the Mount of Olives. Unexpectedly, in the garden of Gethsemane, Christ will find the same three men sleeping.

What was the purpose of this supernatural event? Permit me to quote Pope Benedict XVI, a renowned scholar himself and a first-rate pastor of souls:

"This is the crucial point: The Transfiguration is an anticipation of the Resurrection, but this presupposes death. Jesus expresses his glory to the Apostles so that they may have the strength to face the scandal of the cross and understand that it is necessary to pass through many tribulations in order to reach the Kingdom of God."

The glory of Jesus (and our glory, too) will come only by way of the cross. It is interesting to note that the various accounts of the Transfiguration of Jesus in the three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) are followed by the story of the man with the epileptic son, who called upon Jesus to heal him (Mk.9:14-29). The disciples could not avoid the messiness of life. Like Jesus, they could not remain on the mountaintop for long. "As they came down from the mountain, Jesus warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead"(Mk.9:9). Their glory will come only by way of the cross.

In the Transfiguration event, the Heavenly Father speaks. He proclaims Jesus as his beloved Son. We read in Sacred Scripture: "This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him"

(Mk.9:7). To enter eternal life requires listening to Jesus and following him in the way of the cross.

Today, so many voices compete for our attention. But, in the end, only one voice matters, the voice of Our Lord Jesus. As we continue on our Lenten journey, let us pause to reflect deeply on the luminous mystery of the Transfiguration. May the scandal of the cross be softened by the beauty of the Transfigured Christ.

Amen!