

Proclamation of the Gospel

The Lord be with you.
And with your Spirit.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Saint Mark.
Glory to You, O Lord.

Jesus took Peter, James, and John off by themselves with Him and led them up a high mountain where He was transfigured before their eyes. His clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than the work any bleach could make them.

Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and the two were in conversation with Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus, "Rabbi," he said. "How good it is for us to be here! Let us erect three booths on this site: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He hardly knew what to say, for they were all overcome with awe.

A cloud came overshadowing them; and out of the cloud came a voice, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them only Jesus and as they were coming down from the mountain, He strictly enjoined them not to tell anyone what they had seen before the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept this word of His to themselves, though they continued to discuss what to rise from the dead meant.

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily by Fr. Gerry Hurley

Great Gospel passage for our Lenten season, yes? Yes. Really. Having something really exciting, energizing, and inviting to be directive for us. An amazing scene really. Jesus was in between. He was transitioning on that movement toward Jerusalem where he knew what was happening, what was coming down, and that He was going to meet the fate of all of the prophets previously in Jerusalem. He understood that. He made it clear to the disciples along the way, but they did not catch it.

And, then He has just given instructions on the cost of discipleship, or the requirements for discipleship. Then, He takes these central figures up the mountain — James, who becomes the leader in the church in Jerusalem after His death, and Peter, the leader of the overall church, and John, the disciple was really close to Him, the one who reclined on the His breast at the Last Supper, and just had that close connection, he was there with Him when nobody else was there at the foot of the Cross. It was all significant. Jesus brings them up on the mountain, and there He is transfigured before them.

Transfigured means totally changed — not just a little, apparent change, but totally transformed. The light, brighter than anything that the cleaning stuff would make it, the whiteness — sheer light. And then Moses and Elijah appears. In essence it was the Old Testament appearing there on the mountain. Because the whole Old Testament is made up of two primary sections that Jesus refers to often — the Law and the Prophets. The Law is the first five books of the Old Testament attributed to the authorship of Moses, although he was dead by the time they finished it. It's hard to write it when you're dead, right? But, we attribute authorship, the influence, to a specific person in there. And Moses was the influential one in gathering the Law, and hearing the Law, and coming down from the mountain with the basic laws that we got to know as the Ten Commandments.

And then the prophets, represented by the great prophet Elijah, who stood out as the prophet in the Old Testament. All the rest of the books are essentially the minor prophets and the major prophets. There are a few exceptions, the book of Job, a literary piece, the Psalms, and then some prose writing with wisdom, the Book of Wisdom, and out from that the Old Testament is just made up of the Prophets and the Law. And here, they appear with Jesus, and what Jesus is saying, "I'm the embodiment of all of that. The whole Old Testament — now you are going to see it fulfilled in me." He had said that clearly in language, but to experience it in person must've been something else!

That would have be a sight to behold, right? Right? Right! Yeah, sure. It would have been. It would have been awesome to be there at that event. It will be absolutely something else. You ever had an event like that in your life? No? Had anything like it at all? Had anything that was even a shadow of that? Yeah, maybe so, you know. When I was in Switzerland at my sister's place, and her husband. And we went up to Zermatt, up to the mountains. Zermatt is one of those great scenic places in Switzerland, and being up there. You know, the snow, up in the mountains with the sun shining and sitting out on a little place drinking wine. They have no cars or anything up there in the village. They have these little electric carts, like large-size golf carts, that take people around and operate as taxis to the hotels. At night, you hear this little "pssh" a little buzz of the electric cart going by. I thought, I could live here the rest of my life. I know the feeling Peter had. But, that was only a shadow of that. We all get a sense of that. You know, you go someplace and you're away. You take a break from it all. Or, you're even at the beach for a few days and you say, "Let's spend another week, or a month, or a year, or a few years, right? Because you get the sense that's what it's about. It's easy to understand Peter's exuberance and excitement.

He has a pretty cool idea. He said we're gonna build a tent for you, Lord, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. And hey, we're gonna just stand around and hang out, right? No place for them. But the excitement was something else. It was pretty powerful, and pretty intense. What Jesus says to him essentially is, you have mountaintop experiences to help you with valley duty. So, we've gotta go back down, and we've gotta work on this.

We all have experiences, thank God, of God really being relevant and manifesting Himself, even a sense of him being transfigured before us. And hopefully, those things are really sustain us in life. We are having an experience of it ourselves in our parish community, as we go through the Lenten Season and reflect on — “What on Earth am I here for?” — asking ourselves that question. We have 458 people in small groups. That’s a statement. People are saying, “I want to really be reflective on this. I want to do more in terms of growing my faith.” We have 38 groups. We have 35 people that don’t belong to our parish church or community, they belong to other churches or other communities or other denominations. That’s evangelization — really good evangelization — 35 people, that’s a lot of people! That’s reaching out and inviting our brothers and sisters to come and share faith, and to be engaged in the sharing faith with them. How important that is. You have done a great job of that. You ought to be very proud. I’m very proud of you for doing that, and for celebrating in that way, and for reaching out to people.

When we were going through ChristLife, a lot of people thought of evangelization when we talked about it, as going knocking on doors and telling them about the Catholic Faith. No, that’s not evangelization. That might be proselytizing, or you know, just trying to persuade them to be Catholic. That’s not the objective. The objective is sharing faith. It’s a great complement to you all. What a nice job. That is our transfiguration. When we really start sharing faith, and not just keeping it to ourselves, but sharing it with our brothers and sisters.

So last week I talked about the idea of balance in our lives, and I said we’re going to talk about throughout Lent — having balance. And we pulled out of storage our little image of the scales. How about having balance in my life? You know, there is a great emphasis on balance in health, and in eating this, and you know, carbohydrates and the other hydrates, and all the other stuff, and taking this, and doing that — a huge emphasis on that in today’s world. Balance is a valid experience.

Last week we talked about balance, you remember? Pardon? Yes! We talked about balance between what? Between... we talked about balance between — what I’m going to do — (and this is a stable one, see? The old one going up and down) Stable balance between what I’m going to do — what I’m going to do for God, and what God is going to do for me. Having a balance between those realities is particularly important. Why? Because it can get very much out of sorts. For us as Catholics it is very easy for us to get out of sorts with that reality. We tend to be heavily weighted on the side of what I’m going to do. We’ve had, from our earliest days, a significant emphasis on what I’m going to do. We decide, this is what I’m going to do for Lent. This is what I’m going to do for God. I’m gonna get rid of this vice during Lent. I’m gonna give up chocolate during Lent, right? I’m gonna give up candy, which we used to do as kids. And we would give up candy, and then Sundays — we said didn’t count, right? So we’d eat enough on a Sunday to keep us going through Wednesday, and really you weren’t doing much.

One of the issues with Lent is, hey you know, we can easily not do very much. Or, we say I’m gonna give up smoking, and I’m gonna improve, or I’m gonna give up this. And,

so at the end of Lent I'm gonna have lost 15 pounds. It's a great event. But, what spiritual attachment did that have? How did it grow me in my relationship with Jesus Christ? How easily all of my effort becomes focused on me and what I am going to do. How in the world would I know what He wants to do? What He desires to do in my life, unless I get a balance in both of those realities. For us as Catholics, this is particularly true because we have so much teaching and instruction on what we need to do. And even often times, hey if I do this God is going to be more happy with me. He's gonna be more pleased with me if I do this. And if you do it right, man He's gonna be really pleased with you.

We learn those things growing up. They are really ridiculous. God loves me 100% — no matter what I am doing, and even when I am failing to do. He loves me 100%. God is not limited like I am, or like we are. He loves 100% every single one of us. When are we going to surrender to the truth and get a little balance? And then, because of that love, He enables me to improve and begin to change things that need attention, or need change in my life. We tend to get it the wrong way around. We weighed it so heavily on what I'm going to do, and then I'm gonna become absolutely indispensable to God in terms of Him lovingly me. I'm gonna store up so much stuff He's gonna be impressed with me just like my teacher was in school. Doesn't work that way. My teacher loved me quite conditionally, based on my performance and based on how well I did on the test. With God, that is not the case.

So, it's very important for us to have a balance between what I'm going to do, and what I'm going to provide an opportunity for God to do in my life. This week I'd like to talk about a balance between conscience and consciousness. Conscience — we have a great sense of conscience as Catholics, right? We feel a little guilt? Yes. A whole lot of guilt? Yes! Amen. We've done a great job of helping each other to feel guilty. We have. People from other churches say you don't the whole market on guilt. No we don't. But we sure have a good share of it. Because we have promulgated it pretty intensely. From the earliest times, I was given an examination of conscience. You're preparing when you're what 7, 6 for First Penance. You have a sheet here, check yourself out. You feel bad now? Read this and see how bad you can really feel. You know, and see how many sins and how many failures you have, you know. We've grown with an intense sense of that. Then we come to Confession. We have an Examination of Conscience. Have you noticed? There's no good stuff in it. Where's the balance? Where's the balance? How would I have a balance when I look at it from that perspective?

St. Ignatius of Loyola, that great saint, founder of the Jesuits. He had a lot of constitutions that he developed over a period of time. A big number of them were from his own experience when he was lying in bed, and had his leg blown off by a canon and he was going through a real experience of growth in understanding and relationship with God. He had all of the constitutions. When he formed the community, they were like priests around the world. They were obliged to pray the Breviary every day. You had to pray morning prayer, matins early morning. You had to pray noontime, evening prayer, night prayer. But St. Ignatius provided a dispensation for the community which is not provided by the church at large to priests. And consequently I remember seeing a priest,

on a number of different occasions, you know, right before midnight driving home from someplace with my dad, and he's sitting outside reading his Office in front of the headlights of a car. I mean, it's very obligatory. You don't do much through obligation. You never make much progress.

But, St. Ignatius said, "You can skip any one of the hours, but you cannot skip The Examen at the end of the day. The Examen was ostensibly that examination of conscience to examine how you've been, and how you've been growing in your relationship with God. But, what things you're failing to do, mostly. One of his great servants later on in the 70s, George Aschenbrenner, a great Jesuit, he redesigned the Examen. He said what we've got to be doing is really examining, not our conscience, but examining and getting a balance in consciousness. How conscious am I of God? How aware am I? If I'm doing all these things, I can go with very little awareness of Him. I can be doing and doing and doing, and I become a human doing. That's not what He wants me to be. How can I as a human being be aware of, be conscious of Him?

George Aschenbrenner presented the new form of the Examen. He said, let's make it an Examination of Consciousness, not Conscience. In other words, when I wake up in the morning, am I conscious of Him? Of God really being present in my life? When I wake up in the morning do I say, hey thank You Lord for another good night's rest that refreshes me and helps me to make it through this day? Or do I say thank You Lord. Hey, I had some trouble, some sleep last night, You're gonna have to help me more today because I'm gonna be more tired and more stressed because hey, I had some turbulent sleep? Do I become conscious of Him? And then when you go to shower and clean up and get ready for your day, am I conscious of Him? And then you get in your car and say Hmmm...going to work. Are you conscious of Him? Do you bring Him to work with you? Do you invite Him to be in work with you? When you're going to this board meeting, do you invite Him to be a part of it?

When you visit with this person in your office, or visit with this person on the street, or when you're visiting in the grocery store, are you conscious of Him and of His presence? When you're going in to buy the groceries for the family, do you say Lord, come here with me that I may do this and take care of this action well, because this is about feeding my family and nourishing them. Help me to no and understand the blessings that are in this reality. And he said, going through the day, you ask yourself over and over, am I conscious of His presence? He said, a pretty easy way of doing it is looking at it in terms of the "I" and the "we." When I got up in the morning, was it I or was it we? When I went to my meeting, my board meeting, was it I or was it we? When I went off driving to work, was it I or was it we? And then, he said, a simple way of doing it is, you come to the end of the day and instead of finding the faults and things that you missed, you rather examine and you say, you balance the "I's" and the "we's." Then you can improve things tomorrow, and the next day, and the next day.

And you say, well I went to the meeting and never even thought. I went to the hospital and never even gave it another thought. I prayed, asked him to bless this person, but was I conscious before going in there? And did I say Lord, we're going in to visit Patrick,

you know? I ask You to bless him abundantly, and bless his family who are struggling through this illness or sickness at this time. He said, let's balance the "I" and the "we." Pretty nice idea. Wow! Imagine how different that would be, that balance. And, when I'm driving down Highway 25 and I have people in front of me that, ya know, generate some feelings for me, when I'm conscious of His presence imagine the difference it will make. It makes a big difference — "I" or "we."

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