

2nd Sunday of Lent - Cycle A - Transfiguration (2008+)
Genesis 12: 1-4; 2 Timothy 1: 8-10; Matthew 17: 1-9

A mother recently shared with me a conversation she once had with her teenage daughter about going to church on Sunday. Now this daughter very much likes going to church and realizes the importance of worshipping God. The daughter asked the question, "What would we do on Sunday, if we didn't go to Church?"

This question led to reflect on a related question, "What did people do on Sundays before stores were allowed to be open?" Think about it, How did you used to spend your time as family before you gave into the societal acceptability of Sunday shopping? Now, shopping is not a sin, it is morally neutral. There are related moral issues like consumerism and greed and living beyond our means. There is also the issue of a lack of development of our faith lives because we are too busy "living" in this world and putting other priorities before God.

I believe that having correct priorities is an important issue which is at the center of our readings today as we celebrate the transfiguration of our Lord. In reflecting on priorities we have to ask, "What is the role of society and the role of God in dictating our personal choices and decisions?"

Transfiguration -- transformation -- is about change; it is about conversion. The first disciples were changed forever because of their experience of Jesus. Because of the experience of Jesus in the world, our lives are supposed to be different, because we call ourselves Christian. So we have to ask ourselves, "How are our lives different than other people?" Have we truly been transfigured into the image and likeness of Christ? Do we really live as people who believe in the importance of the resurrection? Sadly, most of us would have to admit that we are not all that different than other people, or that we are not always the image of Christ for others. Saddest of all is that most of us would have to admit that we don't even know what believing in the resurrection is supposed to mean in our life.

That I think, is exactly what God is trying to teach us when Paul wrote these words to Timothy: *"(God) saved us and called us to a holy life, not according to our works but according to His own design . . ."* By the death and resurrection of his only Son, God has saved us. Because God has saved us, God also calls us to live lives of holiness. If we truly believe that we are saved, then we also have to live that way. But when we do so, we are not going to be very popular, because this often means going against what our society tells us is right in order that we might live the way God calls us to live. If we truly want to live as transfigured people, people who are different than other people, then we can expect to pay a large price.

Ironically, we will spend a great deal of time and effort in order to better ourselves financially, spending years and thousands of dollars to get a good education so that we can get a good job. We will spend a great deal of time and effort in order to better ourselves physically. We spend millions of dollars on self-help books and classes in order to better ourselves emotionally. We do this because society tells us that these are the right things to do and so we are willing to pay the price for these things.

But when it comes to bettering ourselves morally we tend not to spend as much time or effort. This is the one area in which we need to spend the most time and energy if we truly want to be transfigured, or changed, into the image and likeness of Christ. We tend to make excuses, putting off moral change until later. We oftentimes find ourselves agreeing with people who say that "values are a private matter," or "morality is a matter of our own personal choice." It seems that the only public morality left in our society is not to hurt anyone else, and those who do hurt others deserve to be punished.

If we believe this then we can never be farther from the truth. This type of moral code will never bring about change in our world. This type of values system will never bring about an end to the desire for abortions, or end the talk of euthanasia, or prejudices or wars. To live as transfigured people we have to follow the moral code which God gives to us and we have to work for change in our lives, in our society, and in our world. To live as transfigured people we have to work at bettering ourselves as individuals, not for our own selves, but rather in order that we can give our best selves in service to one another. This is where it is hardest for us to change because it costs us a great price.

The cost of transformation is high, both in terms of our own personal changes and the changes needed in our world.

- Keeping unexpected children
makes an enormous sacrifice in our own personal lifestyles.
- Giving away a child for adoption requires a tremendous sense of selflessness,
placing the well-being of the child before our own emotions.
- Choosing not to live together before marriage,
and saying "no" to sexual relationships outside of marriage,
becomes a witness to others that sexuality is a sacred gift from God.
- Choosing not to use artificial means of birth control
demands discipline in married life.
- Working to bring an end to racism and prejudice
requires taking a public stand as we work for social reforms.
- Standing up to institutions which oppress women, or undocumented aliens,
can bring about our own oppression.
- Working against corporate immorality can cost us our jobs.

Speaking out against the immoral things in our world is not going to make us popular. But Christianity is a religion for adults, demanding heroism. It is not, as society would have it, a religion for children to be observed only at Christmas and Easter.

Christ suffered and died to make the world a better place. He left us a moral code based on the sacredness of human life. We too are called to suffer for the sake of a better world. Only when we Christians are willing to live by the truth, and to suffer for what is right, can we ever hope that our world will be transformed into the kingdom of heaven.

Through the death of Jesus Christ, we have been saved and therefore called to a life of holiness based on the moral code of our God. Are you willing to accept and live by that call?