

We can consider today's feast of the Transfiguration kind of like the All Star Game is to the baseball season – a break from the ordinary – in which we get to see the exceptional players at work. A difference being that we don't hit the half way point of our season of Ordinary Time – until September 10. . . so we are a little early with our mid-season break. . . But it is a break from the ordinary none-the-less.

We celebrate the feast of the Transfiguration every year on August 6th – but theoretically only on Sunday every 7 years --- although we do get the Gospel reading about the Transfiguration every year --- on the 2nd Sunday of Lent. So if you are thinking – “seems like I heard this Gospel already” – you have – back on March 12th. And, like the All Star Game -- Jesus does take his exceptional players up the mountain with him: Peter, James, and John – *but why does he do it???*

Two things that crossed my path this week helped me in my reflecting on this very question: why does Jesus do it – take these three with him up Mount Tabor??? The first thing happened at our [St. George] parish council meeting on Tuesday night. For the last year or so both the council here [and at St. Jude] have been reading part of a document of Vatican II for each meeting – just as a way of educating ourselves on the teachings of the Church. Having completed the document on the laity – which I thought was a logical place for us to start – both are now reading the document on the ministry and the life of priests --- having found out what the laity is supposed to be doing in the Church – what are priests' supposed to be doing – and how are we supposed to be working together? This was part of our reading on Tuesday: “Priests cannot serve God –without being in touch with the divine life.” That is without time for prayer and reflection; without time spent with the Scriptures and extended time for retreat and study – a priest quickly loses touch with the divine life --- and therefore cannot adequately serve God.

Jesus knew this – and modeled it so well --- as we hear many times in the Gospels: he took time off to pray, to reflect, to maintain his focus on the love and will of God. Sometimes he would go off by himself, away from the crowds and the demands of his ministry. But sometimes he DID take others with him – such when he enters the Garden of Gethsemane – when he takes Peter, James and John and ask them to stay awake with him ---- and as he does today, taking his All Star players up the mountain with him. And he does it, I think, so that Peter, James, and John will be able to serve God well – by being in touch with the divine life --- so this not just something priests have to do – but anyone who wants to serve God – anyone who wants to do effective ministry for the Church --- which I hope includes all of you. So as busy as we all can be – *unless* we take time out of our day – such as we are all doing right now – and time throughout the week – to rub elbows, if you will, with God --- of course we will lose focus – and start doing things our way – instead of God's way. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up the mountain – to teach them how to stay connected with God – so as not to lose their focus in the days to come.

The 2nd thing that crossed my path – and led me to reflect on this Gospel in a slightly new way – was the first reading we had at daily Mass on Wednesday. There we read that Moses had just been to the mountain-top himself – to spend some extend time with God – and to receive the 10 Commandments from God's hands. When Moses comes down the mountain --unknown to but – but readily noticed by the Israelites – “Moses did not know that the skin of his face had become radiant while he conversed with the Lord.” That's what happens when we rub elbows with God: we are changed – not always physically – but whenever we strive to stay in touch with the divine life – we are changed. Jesus was: “his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light.” And so were Peter, James and John – the next time Jesus brings up his future suffering and death after they came down the mountain – these All Stars did not vehemently object to it --- as they did before. Now they were far from ready to embrace the prospect – but they did have a better acceptance of it. So we take time out of our busy lives today to ascend to the mountaintop – by coming to this sacred place. Hopefully the time we spend here, staying in touch with the divine life – rubbing elbows with God – will help us stay focused on doing God's will in our lives this week – and not our own. And hopefully we leave this place--- changed --- maybe we do smile a little more readily, or are just a bit more patient with others than when we came.

Maybe our hearts are softened to be a bit less judgmental and a little more accepting and affirming – which the story of Frank is a Chihuahua tried to teach us last week. Maybe we are a bit more accepting of the suffering we have to face or the grief we are experiencing because someone we loved has died. Maybe, just maybe, we are bit more like Jesus when we leave this place than when we came.

I want to end in a way I do far too seldom – with a poem – by Maryknoll Father Joseph Vene-rosó:

Do not bask in Tabor's glory

Nor seek to dwell long in the heights

Accept your task to tell the story

Going down through starless nights.

Where once hidden by the dark cloud

God now waits to be revealed

By your descent into the vast crowd

Where the Cross remains concealed.

No need now for tent or temple

God seeks to dwell in human hearts

Where true worship gives example

Going to earth's farthest parts.

There amid the pain and suffering

Of God's family in distress

No better incense than an offering

Of wounds to touch and heal and bless.

Bow before God's holy presence

When with eyes renewed you see

Nothing less than Christ's true essence

Transforming our humanity.