

The Transfiguration and the True Enlightenment of Culture

Second Sunday of Lent - Mt 17:1-9

Ave Maria Catholic Church, March 5, 2023 - Fr. David M Vidal

The mystery of the *Transfiguration of our Lord* reveals the purpose of our existence. Right before his transfiguration, Jesus was preaching the necessity of his going up “*to Jerusalem and suffer greatly . . . and be killed and on the third day be raised*” (Mt 16:21).

The message of the cross brought confusion to the disciples. The preaching of suffering and death announced the very hour of darkness and the temporary victory of darkness. But the preaching of Jesus goes beyond the description of suffering and death. Jesus proclaims that the true and definitive enlightenment of humanity will come through the cross and will be accomplished by his passion, death, and resurrection.

The cross seems to be an instrument of torture; however, in God’s plan of salvation, the cross is transformed into an instrument of expiation for our sins, an instrument of redemption.

Therefore, in today's reading, St. Paul exhorts Timothy: “*Bear your share of hardship for the Gospel with the strength that comes from God. He saved us and called us to a holy life*” (2 Tm 1:8-9). For the follower of Christ, suffering is nothing but a temporary passage. Why is suffering a transitory condition? Because as the Apostle explains, Jesus “*has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*” (2 Tm 1:10).

The gospel of the *Transfiguration* tells us that Moses and Elijah were conversing with Jesus. And their conversation was related to the events that were about to happen in Jerusalem. With the *Transfiguration*, the passion of Jesus becomes a mystery of light. The sufferings of Christ illumine our existence. And that light must touch every aspect of our lives and transfigure them. This transfiguration will not only happen in the life to come, but it must also happen in our present life.

How do we share in the light of Christ?

First of all, we must accept the gospel. We believe that Christ, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, became man. This has enormous implications for us. This must shape our lives, our thinking, our desires, our goals, and our plans.

The gospel of Jesus Christ brings a radical cure for human nature (fallen because of sin). The gospel of Christ begins with the preaching of “conversion” and “purification.” That is the first message of Jesus: “*Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand,*” (Mt 3:2).

“*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*” (Jn 1:14) to destroy everything that separates us from God and elevate us to a life of grace and friendship with God. There is

nothing more illuminating than that! That is the light of God shining through our darkness and transforming us.

The gospel of Jesus teaches true humanism. Humanism is not the one professed by the Enlightenment, which centered the whole universe on man (without God). This false humanism elevated man as the new god and afterwards threw him away as disposable material.

Humanity is enlightened with Christ. This is what the Second Vatican Council teaches: “*It is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear*” (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22). Then, Jesus teaches us that the true illumination of humanity is the complete liberation from sin and death. That is what Jesus brings us!

If Christ illumines us, we must—as a consequence—enlighten our culture and our world.

Culture exists because human beings exist. Men and women imagine, think, desire, believe and act. The mark that human beings leave on the world is what we call culture. Technology, music, architecture, arts, literature, philosophy, and politics are those elements of culture that we choose to create and promote.

If Christ illumines our lives, He must also enlighten our culture. Then, the disciple of Jesus must answer this question: Do I participate in and share the light of Christ?

In a lecture entitled “*The Prince of This World and the Evangelization of Culture*,” (2010), Archbishop Chaput invites us to think about our role in a society that experiences the benefits of science and technology. He warns us that sometimes we live inside a cocoon of marketing that feeds our appetites, makes death seem remote, and pushes questions about meaning and morality down into matters of private opinion.

The result is this. While many people in the developed world still claim to be religious, their faith – in the words of the Pontifical Council for Culture – is “often more a question of religious feeling than a demanding commitment to God.”

Religion becomes a kind of insurance policy for eternity. Too often, it is little more than a convenient moral language for daily life. And what is worse is that many people no longer have the skills, or even the desire, to understand their circumstances, or to think their way out of the cocoon.

If we are truly fascinated by the transfiguring light that Christ brings to us, if we truly welcome his light in such a way that we become “children of light,” then, we will find our way out of the worldly cocoon, and we will bring the gospel of Christ to our culture and to the world.

We must be apostles of the gospel of Christ in our culture. With the guidance of our Holy Mother Church, we must recognize the true values present in our culture, identify and reject the anti-cultural elements which are also opposed to faith, and proclaim the Good News of the gospel that elevates what is authentically human to another level: the supernatural.

This is our obligation as Catholics. Quoting the words of Archbishop Chaput:

We have an obligation as Catholics to study and understand the world around us. We have a duty not just to penetrate and engage it, but to convert it to Jesus Christ. That work belongs to all of us equally: clergy, laity, and religious.

We are missionaries. That is our primary vocation; it is hardwired into our identity as Christians. God calls each of us to different forms of service in his Church. But we are all equal in baptism. And we all share the same mission of bringing the Gospel to the world, and bringing the world to the Gospel.

As we contemplate the mystery of the *Transfiguration of the Lord* on this second Sunday of Lent, let us recognize our vocation as *children of light*, people illumined by Christ who are ready to enlighten our culture and the world. Amen.