

## Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord 2023

Peter is one of my favourite saints. His enthusiasm for life and his ability to jump right into situations without reflection on the consequences is so fully human. Time takes these gifts and he matures into a man who uses himself for the glory of God. Today Peter has not yet reached maturity of faith so he cannot help but cry out: “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here...”. Having had a profound experience of the Lord, Peter’s instinctive response is to set up camp and remain in the glory of what has just transpired. Would all of us not do the same, if we had an experience right before your eyes?

We do need to be careful with today’s story. We must not try to figure out what happened on Mount Tabor, to answer the question “What happened actually happened there?” There is simply no way for us to do this, to bring the Transfiguration down to what I will call facts. Thank God there is no video of this online!

Neither should we can make the story so miraculous, so out of the ordinary, that we cannot relate to it. That cannot be what the evangelists seek, or they never would have recorded the scene for our prayerful reflection. I think we must accept the story in this way: something of what happened on Mount Tabor can—and should!—occur in our lives as well. This is what the Scriptures offer us, an opportunity for grace.

Grace is, according to the Catholic Catechism, “a participation in the life of God” (No. 1997). Something akin to Tabor does happen each time that we are graced because grace is a moment of particular insight into the meaning of life. Grace is a moment when elements of the same old world are reconfigured in a way that reveals the presence of God. Origin spoke of our “capacity for knowledge.”

Indeed, if “reconfiguration” is an insight that we can produce on our own, then “transfiguration” would be the better choice of word. Grace is a particular moment of insight, one freely given to us by God. Nothing new enters the scene in a moment of insight. Rather, some element moves to the forefront, and suddenly we see everything else in a new way.

What might that moment be? It is as varied as the world itself and as particular as God. It might be quite positive in appearance: falling in love, the birth of a child, coming home, a big win. It also be negative, though it initiates a transfiguration of elements that produce God’s own insight: a diagnosis, a divorce, a death, a loss of any kind. These are events that leave us suddenly saying to ourselves, “If only I had been able to see.”

Grace is always the gift of God, unmerited on our part. But that does not mean that it must be fleeting. After all, God has entered into a covenant with us. He has promised to be present when we gather, when the Gospel is proclaimed, when the sacraments are celebrated. Indeed, we are “graced” whenever we perceive the world itself, or some key part of it, to be the gift of God. Here is an example.

When I lived in Bridgewater I became good friends with my neighbours, Jim and Sharon Davis. We would often have a cup off coffee together and discuss politics. After I moved away, his son Paul was killed in service in Afghanistan. A few weeks after the funeral I went to visit him and we had a what was profound spiritual conversation.

Jim said: “Michael, all I want is for Jesus to come through that front door and with His arms open, embrace me, comfort me, and tell me that Paul was with him. But I know God does not work that way”.

I said: “Jim, I do see Jesus coming through your front door. I have seen him every day since Paul died. He comes in the form of

each and every person who comes bring their condolences.” Jim then remembered all the people who reached out to him and his family since his son died. The words brought about an epiphany that Jim talks about to this day. He said: “If that is the way God works, I’ll allow it.” The path Jim chose after his son died was influenced by the compassion he experienced in those dark and difficult days after Paul’s death. He became involved in bereavement work for military families who lost loved one while serving their country, something he has continued since 2006. A conversation over a cup of coffee became a moment of transfiguration. Jim left the mountain, as we all must do, to live out the meaning of the moment of grace.

He shares this story in a book called “In the Mood for Peace, the Story of the Izzy Doll”, if you want to read a more detailed account.

So let us now pray to be open to the moments of grace in our lives. Let us pray this slightly adapted prayer from Matthew Rolson.

*“Help me, Lord, to see things as you see them, to see you through the person of your Son, as revealed in your Word, and taught to me by your Spirit. Help me also to see people as you see them. Clear away the clouds and distortions of reality that I may have. Help me to see your will. Help me to see how things should be in my life and in the ministry you have entrusted to me. Give me the courage to live your call for me”. Amen.*