

Feast of the Transfiguration

The writer Miguel de Cervantes created a novel from which the play Man of La Mancha was derived. In that play, Don Quixote is an aging man who no longer has all of his senses about him. He believes himself to be a knight-errant destined to slay dragons, rescue damsels in distress, and be courageous in the face of trial.

One of the most memorable characters in the story is Aldonza. She is a village prostitute. But when Don Quixote sees her he calls her his Dulcinea. He sees beauty and purity in her. She initially thinks Quixote is just a foolish old man. But his love for her transforms her. By the end of the movie she comforts the dying Quixote by echoing the words he sang, "The Impossible Dream." In a sense, this song becomes her theme because Don Quixote's love for her had made the impossible possible.

The story of transformation always excites us. The Man of La Mancha was such a successful play for that reason. Likewise, many movies and songs are made about people who are transformed by the love, forgiveness, or courage of another. In a real way, that is the story that we hear of today.

Jesus takes his disciples to a mountain. On that mountain, the divine presence is seen in a cloud and a voice from heaven. Jesus is transformed by this power. With him are Moses and Elijah, the two great witnesses of Israel's past.

Peter, James, and John are witnesses of this transformation. They don't know what to make of it. They only want it to last. Peter suggests building a tent or tabernacle for the three of them. Jesus brushes off that suggestion reminding the apostles that the glory and joy they witnessed would be necessary for the days ahead. Moses had to leave the mountain where the Lord conversed with him to return to the people only to find them worshipping a golden calf. Elijah met the Lord in a tiny whispering voice on the mountain only to be told to go back to Jerusalem and face Queen Jezebel, who wanted to kill him. Jesus too reminds the apostles that their mission will take them to another hill, Calvary. It will be there that this glory will be understood.

The apostles have seen Jesus as teacher, a rabbi, and a prophet. He heals the sick and raises the dead. He can control the winds and the sea. They know they have never seen anyone like Jesus, but they think of him as human like themselves. Now they experience this transfiguration. Soon they will realize that the powers of sin and death will try to destroy Jesus on the cross. This experience is to remind them not to fear what the world can do for it cannot triumph over the Son of Man who comes on the clouds.

Both the experience of the transfiguration and the experience of Calvary are an encounter of the divine in the human. The divine presence is to be found not by escaping from the world of space and time but by embracing it. Jesus allowed his disciples to experience times of great joy and celebration. I am sure they had many times together that are not written in the scriptures apart from the many great times that are listed. Likewise, Jesus taught his disciples that one must embrace the pain and suffering that comes from life and from doing the will of God.

The balance between finding God in happy times and finding Him in pain is not one that is easy for us. I would imagine that if you were asked where do you find the Lord you might respond that I have found Christ in the Eucharist or at prayer. I have found the presence of God in a beautiful sunrise or in the birth of a child. We could easily feel close to God in times

of celebration. But how many people would say they see God in the death of a loved one? Could you see God in the gray days or the storm clouds as well as in the peaceful breeze on a sunny day? The more that we can experience God in both joy and sorrow do we grasp the mystery of God.

Today this transfiguration is for each of us. The power and presence of God can come to us in many ways, if our minds and hearts are open. We hear the voice of God remind us today to "listen to Him." When we listen to Jesus in His word in the scriptures our hearts can burn within us like the disciples on the road to Emmaus. We can come to know Him in the breaking of bread like those travelers experienced when they arrived in Emmaus. Christ desires to show you blessings and joy. Be open to the possibility and then be transformed by it. Amen.