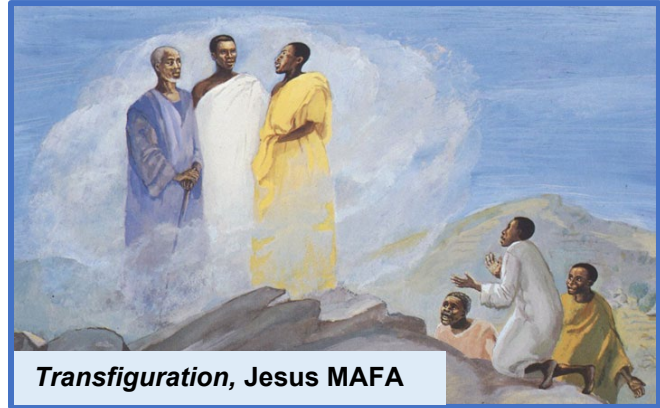


REFLECTIONS FOR THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD ~ 06 August 2023

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

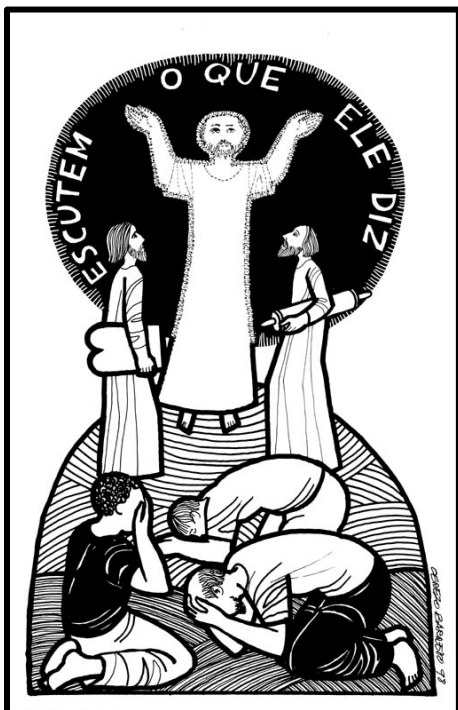
This year the feast of the Transfiguration occurs on Sunday and replaces the liturgy for the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time. The transfiguration is a significant moment in the life of Jesus, in the life of the disciples, and in the memory of Christians today. It is a feast of paradoxes: otherworldly visions and detailed attention to human senses, the humanity of Jesus and the acknowledge by God the Father of the beloved Son, the glory of the One who will rule the heavens and the earth and the preparation of Jesus for great suffering and death, the deep fear of the disciples and the memory that will be a source of deep courage.



Transfiguration, Jesus MAFA

The passage begins with the exact time, “six days later,” six days after Peter has declared that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God (Matt 16:16), six days after Jesus reminds the disciples that he will undergo great suffering and death before he is raised (Matt 16:21), and six days after he chastises Peter for not believing that he will suffer (Matt 16:23). In the next words of the beginning verse, we are told that Jesus brings Peter, James, and John to a high mountain where he is transfigured before them, “his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white” (Matt 17:2). The mountain is the traditional meeting place of God and humans, the place of encounter with the divine, the Holy One.

Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus: Moses, the mediator of the covenant with God on Sinai, and with Elijah the prophet. They represent the Law and the Prophets, the Hebrew Scriptures.



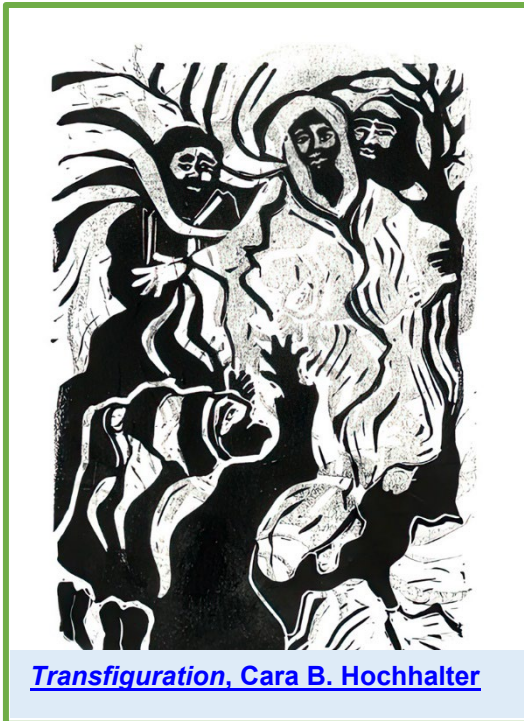
Transfiguration, Cerezo Barredo

Elaine wainwright reminds us that these two holy men from the Old Testament “also experienced transformative encounters with the holy (Moses in Ex 24:15-18 and Elijah on Horeb, 1 Kgs 19:11-15), encounters that took place in their bodies. All these transformations occur in a grounded/earthly space – on a mountain.”

Then “a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!’” (Matt 17:5). Matthew uses images from the book of Daniel to show the otherworldly appearance of Jesus. In that passage from Daniel, the Ancient One confers special powers on the human being who comes in the clouds of heaven, “To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed” (Dan 7:14).

Jesus tells the three disciples who fall on their knees in fear, “Get up and do not be afraid”. The passage ends with the words, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son

of Man has been raised from the dead” (Matt 17:9). They cannot remain on the mountain, but they must return to their ordinary, everyday lives.



Transfiguration, Cara B. Hochhalter

Despite the otherworldly imaging, the passage in Matthew is quite grounded in this world – the images the exact time and location on the mountain, the clouds, the references to the human senses of seeing and hearing and touching, Peter’s generous hospitality in offering to build three booths for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. These images make very present and real this brief moment in Jesus’ life.

There are threads which connect the transfiguration to significant past and future events in Jesus’ life: Jesus’ birth (when the wise ones follow the light of the star to find the one born to be king of the Jews), Jesus’ baptism (when the heavens are opened and a voice cries, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased”), the Sermon on the Mount (when, on the mountain, Jesus says that the pure in heart will see God and again when he tells the disciples, “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” –light imagery linked to the light that shines forth from the transfigured Jesus), and

the resurrection when Jesus meets the women disciples and tells them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me” (Matt 28:10).

In this moment as happened at his baptism, Jesus draws closer to the Father who once more recognizes the Son as the Beloved. Jesus needs this moment to help him make sense of all that has happened to him and to give him the courage and the strength to go to Jerusalem and face great suffering and a terrible death.

The disciples need this moment to realize that the Word of God now continues in the person of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of the living God. For the disciples, while they were not transfigured, they were participants in a transformative encounter as were Moses and Elijah. In that transformative encounter, they come closer to Jesus, and they come closer to the One who tells them, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!’” The disciples need this moment so that they, too, will be able to understand the meaning of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

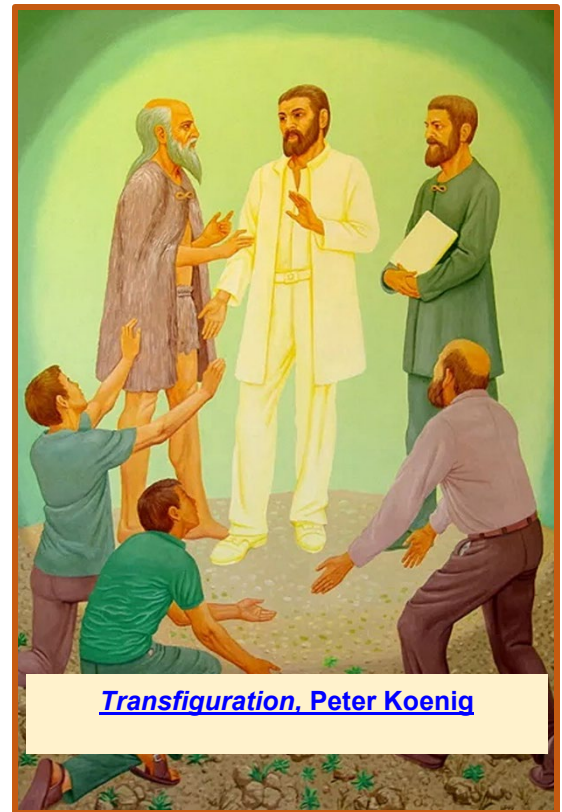
When they return to their ordinary lives, however, they are forever changed. In the words of Pastor Eric Barreto, “The world has gone back to what it was. No prophets of old. No audible divine voice. No light emanating from Jesus’ face. The world has gone back to what it was. But the disciples cannot return to the same world as they descend from this mount. They have been changed. What would it be like to encounter the fullness of God’s promises, not just in words but in the very presence of God’s prophets and God’s unmistakable voice?”

In the second letter of Peter with the only account of the Transfiguration story outside the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, we, as followers of Jesus, are reminded that we need this memory to make sense of our lives in challenging times, “We have the prophetic message more fully

confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pet 1:19). These are such wonderful images of light – a lamp shining in a dark place, the day dawns, the morning star rises in your hearts!

So we not only receive the courage to go on, but we are challenged to become people in whose hearts the morning star rises, people who receive the light of God’s face and who call forth that light in others. Pope Francis says so beautifully, “How many bright faces, how many smiles, how many wrinkles, how many tears and scars reveal love around us! Let us learn to recognize them and to fill our hearts with them. And then let us set out in order to bring the light we have received to others as well, through concrete acts of love (cf 1 Jn 3:18), diving into our daily affairs more generously, loving, serving, and forgiving with greater earnestness and willingness. The contemplation of God’s wonders, the contemplation of God’s face, of the Lord’s face, must move us to the service of others.”

As we hear once more the story of the Transfiguration, let us truly believe that the morning star rises in our hearts. Let us trust that we have been transformed by the light of God’s face revealed in the Son Jesus, revealed in each other, revealed in God’s created universe. Let us hear, with hope and with joy, the poem-prayer of Steve Garnaas-Holmes:



[Transfiguration, Peter Koenig](#)

You are God’s Beloved.
 Let it be so. That’s how you become pure light.
 What was brilliant in Jesus
 was simply God’s pleasure radiating in him.
 Open your heart to God’s desire for you
 like light pouring into a room, like silence receiving a bird song.
 God’s love for you
 burns like a bonfire in you. How do you put *that* under a bushel?
 It’s the gleam in God’s eye that glows in you,
 blood rushing to the Beloved’s face, flush with passion.
 It’s not arrogant to bask in God’s delight in you.
 How stuck up it would be to spurn the Beloved’s ardent passion!
 Lie down and let God make love to you.
 See? Even as you blush reading this you begin to glow.
 Become the Beloved,
 and like a youth in love you will be transfigured with the light of God.

May the morning star rise in your heart! May you bask in God’s delight in you! may you be transfigured with the light of God!