

## **HOMILY for THE FEAST of THE TRANSFIGURATION of OUR LORD – Year A**

Today's Feast gives us a glimpse of Heaven; reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story I'd like to share with you.

A doctor, a nurse, & the president of a health insurance company HMO died & were met by St. Peter at the Pearly Gates in Heaven. St. Peter asked the doctor, "Sir, what did you do on earth?"

The doctor replied, "I healed the sick & worked at a clinic so that if patients could not pay I would help them for free."

"That's wonderful! You may enter," said St. Peter.

Then he asked the nurse what she did on earth.

"I also helped heal the sick & volunteered my time at a free clinic," she replied.

"That's awesome! You may enter too," said St. Peter.

St. Peter came to the last person & asked, "Sir, what did you do on earth?"

The man replied, "I ran the large health insurance organization (HMO). I helped thousands of companies find cost-effective health care for their employees."

"Well, then," St. Peter replied, "You may go in... But, you can only stay for three days!"

Anyway, as you might know, this Sunday the Church celebrates the Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord. This feast was celebrated around the fifth century by the East Syrians. By now we all know where Syria is as this poor country in the Middle East continues to be ravaged by Civil War that has lasted over a dozen of years & killed thousands of people. Anyhow, this feast was inserted into the Church Calendar in 1457 by Pope Callistus III to celebrate the defeat of the Turks at Belgrade. So, this feast has some military implications & marks the miraculous victory for the people of God on the battle field. Perhaps the people of God might not have the best fighters or the most powerful weapons compared to their enemies. Maybe they might not have a huge army like their Turkish invaders. But, what they had was better than the professional fighters, the latest weapons, and the powerful army of their enemies. What they had was their mighty God who would fight on their behalf & defend them against their strongest, toughest enemies. For their God would bring them victory & humiliation to their enemies. The world might not be able to see the power of their God. But, for anyone who believes in the Lord like the people of God, He will let them experience many wonderful miracles like the one connected with today's Feast as they defeated their enemies/the Turks against all odds.

The Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord has its origin in this Sunday's Gospel Story. The story tells us how Jesus revealed Himself as the Lord & the Son of God to three of His disciples – Peter, James, & John – on Mount Tabor. Those disciples were able to hear the voice of God the Father from Heaven & meet two important figures in the Jewish Tradition, namely, Moses & Elijah. That rare experience helped them see the divine nature of Jesus & realize why He is the King of kings & Lord of lords. Jesus was not a typical prophet or an eloquent preacher. He is the Son of God & the Savior whom the people of God had waited for a long time. Jesus is truly the leader whom the early disciples should follow & testify with their own lives. In fact, today's Second Reading shares with us how the early disciples felt about Jesus as following, "It was not by way of cleverly concocted myths that we taught you about coming in power of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we were eyewitnesses of His sovereign majesty. He received glory &

praise from God the Father when that unique declaration came to Him out of the majestic splendor: 'This is my beloved Son on whom my favor rests.' We ourselves heard this said from heaven while we were in His company on the holy mountain. Besides, we possess the prophetic message as something altogether reliable." So, Paul wants to pass on to us the early disciples' beliefs & testimony about Jesus. For Jesus is indeed the Son of God & the long-awaited Messiah.

However, today's Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord is more than just the testimony about the divine nature of Jesus. It's also about the hope & promises for anyone who dares to follow Him. His followers would be rewarded with a place in Heaven with God the Father & all the holy figures of their faith tradition. They would be able to meet with the highly-respected figures like Moses & Elijah. If they want to know how it feels like to be in Heaven, they just need to ask someone like Peter who was blessed with such an experience. Here is his reaction to the transfiguration of Jesus & Heavenly experience, "...Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, how good it is for us to be here! With your permission, I will erect three booths here; one for you, one for Moses, & one for Elijah.'" So, Peter was elated & happy about that experience & wished that it would last much longer. That's why he asked Jesus to let him build three dwellings that would keep the three holy figures with the disciples for a while. Now, you know why most religion would build up a worship place like this church here to help their faithful meet & have a divine experience like the three disciples did on Mount Tabor two thousand years ago.

Peter is not alone in hoping to have a Heavenly experience last longer & perhaps be blessed with it forever. If we talk to someone who has a near-death experience, we'd see that the person would share the same sentiment with Peter. All of them saw a warm light & felt a sense of peace when their soul was about to leave its body. Then, for some unknown reason, the soul was united with the body. They felt shocked & disappointed to be separated from that Heavenly experience. Like Peter, they wanted that awesome experience last forever. That's how it feels to be in Heaven & enjoy the eternal life with God. Today's Feast lets us have a taste of it right here in this life. Hopefully we'd do everything possible to be rewarded with it after this life.

My dear brothers & sisters, the Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord marks the military victory of the Church against the Turks & the miracle that the Lord did to protect His followers in that serious battle. But, it also reminds us about the divine nature of Jesus & the ultimate goal for all Christians, that is, Heaven. For that's where the Lord would put an end to the power of darkness & all His enemies. That's where we can enjoy true peace & happiness with Him for eternity.