I

Children

**Object:**a few baseball cards with major stars on them

Good morning, boys and girls. I brought some baseball cards to show you today. Do you know who these guys are? (Name off the baseball players and the teams they play for) These are all famous baseball players. Wouldn't it be neat to meet some of these guys? Wouldn't that be cool? What would you do? Would you shake their hands? Would you get your picture taken with them? Maybe you'd even get them to sign their autograph for you. It's always exciting when we get to meet famous people. There are so many things you'd want to say to them.

Our Bible story today is about something like that. Jesus took three of His disciples Peter, James, and John and went up on a mountain to pray to God. While Jesus was praying, Moses and Elijah suddenly appeared. Now Moses and Elijah were heroes! They were some of the most famous people around. But they'd been dead hundreds of years. How did they get there? God sent them there to talk to Jesus. When Peter, James, and John saw this, they couldn't believe it! They were so shocked! If God had sent Moses and Elijah to talk to Jesus, then Jesus must be the Son of God. Let's pray and ask God to open our eyes, so that we'll know who Jesus is, too.

Adult

Recently, I had lunch with a number of college students. Out of the blue, one of the young ladies asked me, “So what’s life all about, Father? What wisdom do you have to give us?” Her voice was a bit confrontational. Even still, the answer came to me without any reflection at all. I just told her, “Life is about Jesus Christ. Anything and everything that matters flows from Him and returns to Him.”

This is the fundamental message of Christianity. It is exemplified in today’s feast: The Transfiguration of the Lord.

When Jesus brought Peter, James and John up that mountain, he met with Moses and Elijah. Moses and Elijah! These were two of the most important people of the Hebrew Scriptures. Moses was the great Law Giver. The first five books of the Bible, the Torah, were attributed to Moses. Elijah was the greatest of the prophets. He was the prophet who never died, but was taken up into heaven by the fiery chariot of God. Malachi had prophesied that Elijah would come again. Many believed that he had returned in the person of John the Baptist.

And there, on that mountain, the disciples witnessed Jesus meeting with Moses and Elijah. Why? Why did they meet? What could they have been discussing? Perhaps it was the way that the Father’s Plan would be fulfilled in the Son. Certainly the voice from heaven told the disciples what they needed to hear, “This is my Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him.”

And so we go back to that quick answer to the college student. Jesus Christ is the center of history. He is the center of the universe. Everything that matters flows from Him and points to Him. He is the one who fulfills God’s plan for mankind.

We have to listen to Him because we also have a role in God’s plan for mankind. That meeting with Moses and Elijah had transcended time. Moses probably lived six hundred years before Elijah, and Elijah probably lived eight hundred years before the Incarnation of the Lord. But on that mountain they were united in time. It was as though all that Moses gave, all that Elijah prophesied, was happening in the eternal now of the Word Become Flesh. We are part of that Eternal Now. “This is my Beloved Son. Listen to Him.” Those words are directed to us as well as to Peter, James and John.

But why? Why are we included in the Transfiguration? We are included because each of us has a role to play in God’s Plan for mankind. One of the great statements attributed to our late great pope, Pope Benedict XVI, is: “The world offers you comfort, but you were not made for comfort, you were made for greatness.” We were created for greatness, to share in the Triumph of the Kingdom.

How? How do we share in the Triumph of the Kingdom? We do this by reflecting the presence of God in that unique way that we were created to do. Each of

us can provide the world with an image of God the world never saw before and will never see again. We can and must do this. That is why we need to be united to God in every aspect of our lives and at every moment of our lives.

"It was not by way of cleverly concocted myths that we taught you about the coming in power of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we were eyewitnesses of his sovereign majesty. We ourselves heard the voice from heaven say 'This is my beloved son on whom my favor rests' while we were in his company on the holy mountain."

This passage is from today’s second reading taken from the Second Letter of Peter. It was written towards the end of Peter’s life while he was a captive in Rome. Peter was aware that some people were leaving Christianity. They were attracted by some very strange stories, half Christian and half pagan. Among these stories were the stories of the Gnostics. The Gnostics taught that there was a secret seed that was implanted into their heads. If you didn’t believe them it was because you didn’t have the secret seed of knowledge in your head. The word gnostic means a secret knowledge. Gnosticism was so confusing that most people couldn't figure out anything about it other than it was strange. For that reason it had an attraction to many people. In some ways it was similar to modern day Scientology, a secret society based on fabricated stories.

St. Peter's message to the Christians of his time and ours is to stop looking for fantastic stories and believe the accounts of the eyewitnesses of the Lord. Many refuse to listen to this message. Fantasy seems so interesting. All of us have enough of the science fiction buff in us that we want to believe strange stories. We want to believe in flying saucers and underwater cities and dragons and unicorns. There is an enormous attraction in a fantasy. But this attraction can be destructive. It can lead to us denying our faith.

Fantasy can easily replace reality. The Lord is real. He is right before us. The Hebrew Scriptures, the Law and the Prophets, predicted his coming. The disciples witnessed his coming. What Peter wrote, simply enough, is that it is time for us to stop looking. Jesus is the One.

We are called to have faith that the Jesus the apostles saw is the Son of the God that we cannot see. The One we learn about in Scripture is the Eternal Word. Our faith is based not on intellectual curiosities but on the testim ony of Sacred Scripture and the witness of the apostles.

We focus on the Lord. We experience His Presence within us. And we proclaim to the world: God is real. Jesus Christ is real. All that matters is that which flows from the Lord and returns to Him.

To the extent that we make this proclamation with our lives, to that extent we are participants in God’s plan for mankind.

II Desaino

**When I was growing up, I noticed a big difference between our apartment on the West Side of Manhattan, and my aunt’s on the East side.  We always had lights on; she rarely did.  I asked my mother why?  It turns out that we lived in the projects where electricity was included in our rent.  My aunt, on the other hand, lived in a private tenement building and received a monthly bill for electricity.  Therefore, she never turned on a light until it was absolutely necessary.**

**Some of us are creatures of the night; we like it dark and feel comfortable when it’s cooler.  Others of us are daytime folks; we adore the sun and cannot get enough of it.  Daytime people go to the beach; nighttime people go to the mountains.  It’s a mystery of our psychology.**

**Because of the way we approach the Gospel today, we think of it as a daytime event.  Jesus’ face becomes like the sun; everything turns so bright that the apostles are confused.  But it is attractive, this brilliance and glory, so attractive that Peter wants to build a shrine so he can keep it like that.  But then we get a chance to see the darkness side of the Gospel because at that moment a cloud forms that creates a shadow over them and the light seems hidden.**

**One of the deceptions of our spiritual lives is that we can think it’s all about brightness.  Lots of candles, lots of spotlights, lots of stained-glass windows to show the glory of our faith.  Indeed, we thank God for this and do not begrudge one moment when God’s glory comes upon us, both in church and in our lives.  But these moments of glory take place within the clouds under which we mostly live.  One of our prayers to Mary talks about how we live in the valley of sorry as exiled children of Eve.**

**In fact, we also need times of quiet, silence, reflection, darkness: these are powerful moments of our faith lives.  They may not always be times of sorrow or stress.  They may be what we imagine monks might feel when they rise in the night to pray, or what a child might feel when, awakened in the night, mom is there to bring consolation.  Nighttime makes our ears sharp.  We listen better.**

**And that’s the main line of the Gospel: the call to hear Jesus in a new way.  “This is my beloved Son, listen to him,” the voice from heaven tells the apostles.  In the darkness of our lives, God might be speaking even more powerfully in our lives than in times of brightness.  Because we can see less, our ears can perk up and we can listen all the better.**

**Maybe this is a message we have to bring to others who think that God’s light has disappeared from their lives. God is always with us.  He sent his Son Jesus to demonstrate for us that his love is always surrounding us, whether that love feels like a warm ray of sun or whether it feels like a quiet moment in the night.  Even more, sometimes we are the voice that God is speaking to people—letting them know that God’s presence is always there for us, that we can sense that presence and heart his voice if we quiet ourselves down enough.**

**The vision of Jesus points to his Resurrection.  You and I live in that Resurrection because we are believers.  That resurrection touches every moment of four lives, especially those that seem the darkest or even the saddest. Because Resurrection is speaking of hope and hope shines God’s light in every corner of our lives.**

III

Fr Tommy Lane

What a grace for Peter, James, and John to see Jesus transfigured. They got a preview of the glory of Jesus risen from the dead and his glory in heaven. It was also a preview of the glory we all hope to share in heaven. This was a very special grace for Peter, James, and John.

It was not the only special grace Jesus shared with Peter, James, and John. Earlier in the Gospels of Mark and Luke, we read that Jesus allowed Peter, James, and John with him into the house of the synagogue official whose daughter he raised up again (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51). Later, when Jesus was teaching in the temple, Peter, James, and John asked Jesus a question privately and he gave them more teaching (Mark 13:3). In Gethsemane, Jesus took Peter, James, and John aside from the others to be near him during his agony (Mark 14:33). So Peter, James, and John received many special graces from Jesus.

Just before receiving this special grace of seeing Jesus transfigured, Jesus told his disciples that he must suffer greatly, be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes, be killed and rise after three days (Matt 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22). How did they react? Peter (in Matt and Mark) rebuked Jesus for saying this (Matt 16:22; Mark 8:32) and Jesus responded, “Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.” (Matt 16:23; Mark 8:33) The disciples had to learn that Jesus was not the type of Messiah they were expecting. Instead of being a Messiah to liberate Palestine from Roman domination, Jesus told them he would be a suffering Messiah and would be executed. What a shock! That was too much for them to understand then. Immediately following this we read that Peter, James, and John saw Jesus transfigured (Matt 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-10; Luke 9:28-36). They needed this grace now. They had left everything to follow Jesus and he had just told them he would be killed. They needed reassurance, and Jesus did not let them down. They received a huge grace now on the mountain as they saw Jesus transfigured.

Moses and Elijah also appeared and spoke with Jesus. Moses received the Law from God on Mount Sinai. Elijah could be regarded as the greatest of the prophets; certainly here he is a representative of the prophets during Jesus’ transfiguration. So we have the Law and the Prophets, as the Old Testament was often called, with Jesus on the mountain. The Old Testament was pointing forward to Jesus as we heard in that beautiful prophecy of Jesus in our first reading from Daniel 7. Now two great figures of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah, appeared on the mountain with Jesus transfigured, to confirm that Jesus was indeed the expected Messiah. In the opening prayer today we heard,

O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration
of your Only Begotten Son
confirmed the mysteries of faith by the witness of the Fathers.

The witness of the Fathers was Moses and Elijah witnessing Jesus’ transfiguration. Also, Jesus’ Father witnessed from heaven, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.” So the Old Testament and the Father in heaven confirmed that Jesus was indeed the expected Messiah. Although Jesus had just shocked them by telling them he must suffer and die, this is, in fact, the plan of God for Jesus.

The Father said, “Listen to him.” In other words, “Do not be scandalized at the teaching of my son Jesus about his forthcoming Passion, death, and resurrection.” Will they listen to Jesus? Will they stand by Jesus as he goes to his Passion and death? We know the story. Peter denied Jesus in the courtyard of the high priest, and James, like the rest of the disciples, abandoned Jesus. Only John listened to Jesus and was not scandalized by the passion and death of Jesus. In John’s Gospel we read that John went right into the courtyard of the high priest while Jesus was being tried (John 18:16) and went all the way to the cross with the women (John 19:25-27). When the crunch came between Holy Thursday night and the first appearance of Jesus on Easter Sunday, Peter and James did not listen; they abandoned Jesus. Their abandonment of Jesus was only temporary, while John remained faithful right during Jesus’ Passion. Later all three of them, Peter, James, and John, became great witnesses to Jesus. Peter became the first Pope and bishop of Rome. James was executed in Jerusalem by King Herod for witnessing to Jesus (Acts 12:2) and John authored the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John. So the three disciples did listen to Jesus although two of them were temporarily unfaithful during the Passion of Jesus.

Perhaps we are disappointed that Peter and James did not listen to Jesus—did not remain faithful to Jesus—during the time he most needed them. They had seen Jesus transfigured and heard the command of the Father to listen to Jesus. They had been with Jesus for other intimate moments like the raising of the girl to life, but they were scandalized by the Passion of Jesus. Yet why should we be disappointed with them because we also have experienced and met Jesus in many ways and sometimes we too let him down?

* We meet Jesus in a most intimate way every time we receive Jesus in the Eucharist. It is the time when we are closest to Jesus.
* We meet Jesus in the Scriptures as they touch our hearts. Jesus speaks to us now when we read the Scriptures. The Scriptures are not just about the life of Jesus; in the Scriptures Jesus also speaks to us about our lives and in them we meet Jesus as he speaks to us about our lives.
* We meet Jesus in a very special way in all the sacraments.
* We have seen Jesus in great people like Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa.

But just as Peter and James needed to know after Jesus’ resurrection that he did not hold their abandonment of him against them, we need to be reconciled to Jesus often. We need to meet Jesus in the Sacrament of Reconciliation often because there are times when we do not listen to Jesus—times when we deny Jesus, not in the courtyard of the high priest in Jerusalem, but maybe sometimes in our families, or perhaps where we work, or maybe in our communities. But we do not have to be conquered or governed by our weaknesses or sinfulness. Just as Peter, James, and John received the special grace of seeing Jesus transfigured, and received many other graces from Jesus, we too have received many graces from Jesus to help us become the great people he has called us to be and to witness to him wherever life demands.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah during the transfiguration, and the Father saying, “This is my beloved Son,” confirm that Jesus is indeed the expected Messiah. The Father commanded: “Listen to him.” John is a model disciple; he was faithful to Jesus to the end. Peter and James for a short while did not listen to Jesus, but just as Peter, James, John became great witnesses to Jesus, we too can become great witnesses to Jesus.

Copyright © Fr. Tommy Lane 2006