

The Transfiguration of the Lord, Year A, Catechist

Submitted by lectionaryadmin on Wed, 10/19/2016 - 20:00

Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for the session read all the readings:

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

Psalm 97:1-2, 5-6, 9

2 Peter 1:16-19

Matthew 17:1-9

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading that appealed to you? Was there a word or image that stood out to you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word in Liturgy

The Transfiguration celebrates an event in the life of the Lord, and thus draws the Church into a deeper appreciation of his identity and mission. When the Church proclaims the story of the Transfiguration on the Second Sunday of Lent, it looks toward the specific ways in which the event prefigures the glory of Easter, leading the faithful to a renewal of their baptismal promises. Here, on the feast itself, the focus is instead on the glory of God seen in Jesus. We behold God's glory through the apocalyptic vision of the prophet Daniel, we celebrate it through the psalm, we are dazzled by it along with the Apostles as we behold the face of Jesus on the high mountaintop, and we affirm it along with the second Letter of Peter as a promise of the Second Coming.

The Book of Daniel, written in the mid-second century BC, is a combination of edifying stories and apocalyptic literature. The book promotes faithfulness to Judaism and resistance to Hellenizing influences. In it the God of Israel is presented as the Lord of all human history. Today's reading is part of an apocalyptic vision in which the Son of Man, who represents the kingdom of the holy ones of God, comes down from Heaven and is given dominion by the "Ancient One," who represents God. The Son of Man in the passage was later taken to be a messianic figure. When "Son of Man" became the preferred title for Jesus, the Church interpreted this passage to point to him, and combined this apocalyptic vision with the notion of suffering. God is presented here, as in the psalm, with the typical features of a theophany (appearance of God to human beings), such as fire and light.

The second Letter of Peter, written near the end of the first century and the beginning of the second, uses the name of Peter, but is too late to have been written by Peter himself. (Later authors used the name of an authoritative witness to indicate the importance of the content of the letter.) The purpose of this letter is mainly to warn against the dangers of false teachers. Thus, it reveals the continuing concerns of the early Church in the period after the death of the first Apostles. Today's passage encourages the community to expect the *parousia*, the Second Coming of Christ, because of what had been seen by the Apostles in the Transfiguration.

Throughout his Gospel Matthew is concerned to present Jesus as “the new Moses” delivering “the new law” to “the new Israel.” It is significant that he locates the Transfiguration on a “high mountain.” Like Moses, whose face was shining from the theophany on Mount Sinai, Jesus is portrayed in brilliant light. The cloud overshadowing Jesus also recalls the Jewish concept of *shekinah*, or “shadow of the Almighty,” as well as the pillar of cloud that led the Israelites through the desert. It is significant that Moses and Elijah, who represent the law and the prophets, give way to Jesus, who remains alone, thus suggesting that both the law and the prophets reach their culmination in him.

Catholic Doctrine

Visions and Private Revelations

The Catholic Church teaches that Jesus Christ alone offers the fullness of God’s Revelation to us. The mystery of Christ illuminates the mystery of creation (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 280). Indeed, in his life, his mission, his suffering, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, God’s Son reveals to us the love of the Father through the Holy Spirit. The Apostles witnessed to the truth of the Resurrection and, in time, the Gospels were set down in writing. Together, Scripture and Tradition form one single deposit of Revelation, which the Church preserves, preaches from, and interprets in the light of the present-day needs. Thus, the Second Vatican Council, citing 1 Timothy 6:14 and Titus 2:13 taught, “The Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Dei Verbum* 4).

In other words, the Council teaches that everything that God chooses to communicate to us for our salvation has been done so in Jesus and that no new “public” revelation will be given before Christ comes a second time in glory to this world of ours. This does not mean that the content of Revelation as given in Jesus cannot be understood anew or interpreted freshly given the situation of the world. It simply means that nothing will be added.

In the history of Christian mysticism there are many examples of individual mystics who have claimed a private experience that communicates or reveals the activity of God. This extraordinary phenomenon may be comprised of images, ideas, or words. This communication of God to the mystic may result in physical, psychological, or intellectual manifestations. The appearances of Mary at Lourdes and Fatima fall into this category of private revelation. Approved by the Church as credible, these apparitions are nonetheless not held by the Church to be part of the content of doctrine or teaching. The approval is stated in the negative, that there is nothing there that would harm the faith.

As with any image or artistic rendering of the mystery of God’s Self-Revelation to us in Jesus, none of these apparitions or mystical experiences and visions can supercede the Christ event. In that sense, both in art and in these visions, that which is communicated enhances and draws out the meaning conveyed by Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God.

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