

Last Epiphany A

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If you are like me, there are times when we are hiking, or driving, or just gazing off into the distance where we can't quite make out something or someone.

There is a kind of dim murkiness, a grayness which won't allow us to have full recognition of what we are straining to see. Then the haze lifts, light hits the object in a different way, greater clarity is gained and we declare, "Now I can see clearly!"

That kind of revelation moment happened to Simon Peter, James, and John on the mountain with Jesus. They thought they knew who Jesus was, but after this experience they saw him in a new light.

Jesus takes them on the mountain to pray quietly. And while there, Jesus begins to glow, almost as if he were radioactive. He is shining brighter than the brightest whites in a modern laundry. The disciples cover their eyes, the light is so bright.

But peeking between their fingers, they see that Jesus is flanked by Moses and Elijah.

Moses -- whose face had shown with God's glory when he received 10 Commandments on Mount Sinai.

Elijah -- whose journey into heaven was so lit by God's glory that the chariot seemed to be on fire. Jesus -- shining with God's glory-- in Hebrew the word is *Shekinah*. Moses and Elijah reflecting that glory in the same way that the law and the prophets reflect God's Shekinah. What an experience! It transfigured Jesus and how they saw him.

Parish of the Epiphany is preparing to observe Ash Wednesday this coming week and has decided that we need a transfiguration experience within our parish during these forty days of Lent leading up to Holy Week and Easter. We need to see Jesus in a new light. We need to allow ourselves to be transfigured so that we might embrace the Risen Jesus on Easter morning.

We need this same Jesus from our gospel story to reach down (as with the disciples) and touch each and every one of us as he whispers, "Get up and do not be afraid."

Get up. Get moving. Get in gear. Get right with God. How this will happen is just like Peter, James and John. It will be a small group who will gather, listen, learn and be changed in no less of a way than the Mount of Transfiguration.

As Jesus invited these three disciples to come witness the most amazing experience of their lives, beginning next week each of you is invited to likewise to meet with others from this parish and reveal the presence of Jesus in our midst.

A radical Jesuit priest by the name of Gregory Boyle will lead us in our Lenten journey. It was said of this priest, "*He is the patron saint of second chances and humility and is purposeful always in saying you don't go to the margins to influence others, you go to the margins to be influenced by them.*"

Greg Boyle wrote *Tattoos on the Heart*. People will be transfigured by the stories they will read with others, finding, as Boyle describes, "*that once we know that we are unshakably good and that we belong to each other, we can roll up our sleeves ... and create anew this place of love and belonging that God would recognize.*"

Even though Boyle does this in his 50 years of ministry among gangs and street people in Los Angeles, I guarantee you that every story in this book will sound like it came out of your own life.

After Jesus urged the disciples to get up, he says, *Do Not Be Afraid*. My friends, fear has crippled many of us through the past three years or longer to cower and push the hand of Jesus away when he reaches to touch us.

Nelson Mandela who knew his share of fear said, "*I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.*"

As you sit here today, pondering the challenges and anxieties which lead to our own fear, the transfigured Jesus is extending his hand as he pleads, *Do Not Be Afraid*.

None of us need struggle to overcome our fears alone. None of us need feel isolated or having to conquer our own fears alone.

Jesus knew that these three disciples in only a matter of days would be facing the arrest, and trial and death of their teacher and messiah. It would be the transfigured faith of Peter and James and John that would see them through the perilous times ahead.

Another of the later disciples, the Apostle Paul, described the power of this transfiguration for all believers: "*We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of God, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another.*"

Won't you allow this approaching time of Lent to deepen your trust in support of others, such as in a small group sharing *Tattoos on the Heart* together.

Won't you draw the extended hand of Jesus who beckons, *Get up and do not be afraid* closer to you and not push it away?

Won't you allow those fears that threaten to overwhelm you to be laid at the feet of the Transfigured Jesus?

May we enter into this new season with these triumphal words on our lips from a familiar hymn:

Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes, Thou reignest in glory; thou dwellest in light; thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight; all laud we would render: O help us to see 'tis only the splendor of light hideth thee.

AMEN.