

Transfiguration of the Lord, A – August 6, 2017 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 850 words

Last week we began to consider the treasure of the Church, which is the Word of God – the entire Word of God, both the new and the old, that which is written and that which is conserved through Tradition... the whole thing. The Word of God, which has been entrusted to the Church, is a gift for us, a gift for others, and it is the focus or object of our worship. As a gift for us, we need that “understanding heart” that we considered and prayed about last week, in order to grasp it more fully, particularly when it challenges us. We need an “understanding heart” so that we can embrace all that God has revealed for our happiness and strive to live it out with fidelity.

Part of “living it out” is through sharing the riches of our faith with others, and that is what we will consider this week. We share the riches of our faith in both word and action. At first glance, our readings for the Transfiguration might appear to have nothing to do with this theme. But there are at least two ways they do.

The first is that God the Father commanded the disciples who were on the mountain with Christ to listen to his beloved Son. When we spend time pondering the Word of God in daily prayer, seeking to have that “understanding heart” that Solomon also prayed for – in those moments, we are “on the mountain” with Christ. And what does he tell us to do? He pushes us to greater daily fidelity in our respective vocations, greater charity toward others, and better love for ourselves. Indeed, in the gospel, Christ sums up all the commandments in a twofold way: “Love the Lord your God... and love your neighbor as yourself.”¹ The proper love of self is a topic for another homily – a very important topic that we need to do justice to at some point. For now, however, we are focusing on the love of neighbor, and this brings us to the second way that this gospel relates to our theme.

Loving neighbor ultimately means coming down off the mountain. The disciples descended only reluctantly; Peter said, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents...”: the disciples would have preferred to stay. But no, they had to go back down, and then shortly after that, our Lord was speaking to them about his Passion. Our time in prayer is meant to strengthen us to face the nitty-gritty of life; that time on the mountain is to help us then to go down, take up our crosses, and follow after Christ in the day-to-day. It means getting our hands dirty, and sometimes doing things that we would rather not. This service takes many forms, from helping the poor to listening to a friend in need and many other things besides.

But there is a pitfall here: our love of neighbor falls short if it is not accompanied by that which is distinctively ours to give: the treasure of our faith. Using our two examples, it’s straightforward enough to give a person on the street some money or food. It’s simple enough to listen to a friend who is going through a difficult time. But how do we bring the Word of God to these – and other – forms of service?

Here we see the challenge. And there is a phrase that our Lord uses elsewhere in the gospel that always helps me in this regard. It is: “even the pagans do that”. (The Lord says, “If you greet only your own brothers, what are you doing more than others? Even the pagans do that.”²) In other words, how is my love of neighbor different than that of a pagan? When I help a poor person, do I just give them something, or do I also try, in some way, to give them Christ? When I listen to a friend in need, do I just give them worldly wisdom, or do I try, in some way, to encourage them in Christ? We can apply this to any aspect of love of neighbor: how does my

¹ Mark 12:30-31.

² Matthew 5:46.

service reflect my Catholic faith, my having contemplated the Word with an “understanding heart”, my striving to share the treasure with others?

Well then, we have enough to consider for this week: sharing the treasure of our faith with others by helping those in need, and doing so as Catholics who desire also to give the love of Christ. In the end, we need to return to last week’s prayer: “Lord, give your servant an ‘understanding heart’”! Lord, when I see someone in need, help me to assist them with my resources – but also with yours. Help me to identify their true need, which is to be loved, even in a small way. You help me to carry my cross; you will help me to assist others with theirs as well. I want to be your hands and your heart. Lord, give me, your servant, an “understanding heart”! Amen.