

Year C, March 3, 2019  
Last Epiphany  
Christ Church, Mexia

In both the OT and NT readings that we heard today the appearance of people, Moses and Jesus specifically, who had been in the presence of God, changed. Moses' face was shining so much that it scared the people and he had to wear a veil to help alleviate their fear. The appearance of Jesus' face "changed" and his clothes became "dazzling white." They were transfigured.

To be transfigured is to be changed in appearance, as in metamorphosis, or to experience an exalting, glorifying or spiritual change. In today's reading from his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul is explaining to them that turning to Christ with their hearts and souls is different than just following the Law, and that it is through the glory of God that they can be transformed. Remember that this church was experiencing problems; there was a need for change. Paul, whose life was changed completely by an encounter with the risen Christ, is well qualified to speak on this subject. He experienced it first-hand.

To see, or truly experience, God or Christ should transform us. But such an experience may be more elusive than Paul acknowledges. For example, who is God? John Philip Newell, a minister in the Church of Scotland and an internationally recognized authority on Celtic spirituality, writes in his book, *Christ of the Celts*: "Often we use the word *God* as if we know exactly what we are talking about. It is as if *God*, which is really a metaphor, becomes the proper name for the Unknown, and in using it we think we have named that which is beyond names." Think about it for a moment. Recall Moses' experience in the wilderness with the burning bush, his reluctance to go to Egypt as requested, and his question about God's name.

But Newell continues: "The tendency to name and define the Ineffable has given rise to the tendency also to standardize our experience of the Presence. (standardize, not personalize – and perhaps our BCP even adds to this tendency) This not only limits what we have to say, but it also narrows our expectations of where and when and how we will encounter the sacred. (at church, during prayer, 'small, still voice, for example) And for vast numbers of people, including many of my friends and family, it silences even the thought of being personally addressed at the core of our being by the Unknown." Here he

suggests, I believe, how we usually don't expect or attempt to have the up-close and personal encounter with God and the difficulty of sharing it with others, if we do – if we are so fortunate.

He then talks about an experience he had when he was young. He believes that it was not the result of his religious devotion or specific search but was rather a gift. And he acknowledges that the only religious language available to him was inadequate for him to be able to share with others, so he kept it a secret until much later. But he contends that it is vital for us to share these experiences, and notes that early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century a new vision of Christ appeared in the Celtic world through the sharing of George MacLeod, founder of the Iona Community in Scotland, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the French mystic, scientist and priest. They both personally experienced Christ as the suffering presence of Love while serving in WWI. So, amid our brokenness, our battles, our dissension – as in the church at Corinth – “it is here that we are invited to look for the Presence, as well as in the beauty and wildness of our creation and the limitless imagination and longings of the human spirit.” And so, we are encouraged to look beyond the boundaries that may be set by our standardized religious beliefs.

Later, he shares: “Teilhard coined the concept of ‘ex-centration’ as his way of saying that we find our true selves outside of ourselves or that we find our true center at the heart of one another and at the heart of all life. ... The deeper we move within our souls, the closer we come to the soul of one another. And the closer we come to the heart of all life, the nearer we come to the heart of our own being.” These are the concepts that Paul wanted for the church at Corinth, and by extension, for us. This is what church is about – helping each other to a deeper, richer understanding of our spirituality.

We are changed by many things. I teach at college, and I know that the experience of college/university generally changes the lives of those who experience it in many different ways. One of the things that insures that change is knowledge. Knowledge usually prevents us from remaining the same. And if we can be changed by earthly things, then how could we not be changed by an encounter with the Holy One.

We now conclude Epiphany, where our attention has been focused on Jesus as the Christ – the one who allows us to see and know our Creator better. And as we begin our Lenten journey that will end at Easter, let me end with two observations. First from Br. Curtis Almquist, SSJE, “Jesus changes our image of God. Jesus immerses

himself in life - eating and drinking, walking and working, and weeping, and resting, touching and feeling, and pointing to the very ordinary stuff of life as being revelatory: revelatory of what life is to be and of who he is to be for us." And again, borrowing from Newell: "And so the cross of Christ becomes for Teilhard our 'true image.' It is in no sense an expiation or payment to God. It is a revelation of the Presence at the heart of the universe. It reveals the greatest truth, that we will keep our heart only by giving our heart away, that we will find ourselves only by losing ourselves in love, that we will gain salvation only by spreading our arms wide for one another and for the earth, and that we will be saved together, not in separation.

May we come to see that our worship and life experiences should bring us closer to Jesus than just knowing about "historical Jesus" of the Bible. And when we truly encounter the Presence, may we find the words to share our stories - because the world needs to hear them.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

*Amen.*