Sermon March 3, 2019

Luke 9:28-43a

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Today our readings refer to spiritual and physical transformation:

In our Old Testament reading, Moses comes down from atop Mt. Sinai carrying the Ten Commandment tablets. The people see his face and are afraid to come near him since his face is “shining because he was talking to God”

By the way, here is a fun fact; there was an error made when Jerome (a scholar in the late 4th century) translated the Hebrew bible into Latin (named the Vulgate bible). The Hebrew word that described Moses shining face is “keren”, which can mean either radiated light or “grew horns”.

Jerome chose “horns” and that answers the question of why we see some images of Moses wearing horns!

Anyway, Moses’ appearance changed drastically whenever he spoke directly to God.

So, Moses’ brought down these commandments on the best way to live. And also, over many other conversations with God, presented many more commandments – which came to be known as the Laws of Moses.

These laws commanded what they ate, how they worshipped, and other day-to-day activities.

What happened was that over time the religious authorities condemned those who failed to obey the laws, while the authorities themselves failed to obey them as well.

Over time, the purpose of the laws became corrupted. Instead of praying to God with an open heart and mind and being willing to be transformed by God’s love, the people found themselves ashamed and guilt ridden when they made mistakes.

Which led them to avoid prayer, which led them to turn away from God.

That wasn’t the purpose of the laws in the beginning. The primary purpose of the laws of Moses was to separate God’s people from the pagans who worshipped many gods. To teach the people there was only one God who loved them as his children and to teach them the best ways to live as a faith community.

What our readings today ask us to reflect on is the power of prayer. A power so great it can physically and spiritually change you.

When we present ourselves in prayer, speaking with Christ one on one, we unveil our hearts and minds, so that this transformation can occur.

St. Paul writes it is the Holy Spirit who transforms us, allowing us to carry the image of the glory of the Lord within us and reflect it out to those who see us.

You may think, “Well, that’s not so with me. I don’t feel transformed when I pray.” or, “I often feel like my prayer is one way, I feel nothing in return.”

And those are very valid thoughts and feelings.

St. Ignatius addressed these concerns when he wrote about discerning the Holy Spirit’s presence. He wrote there will be times in prayer when we feel so rewarded, so complete, that we want to experience that feeling every time we pray. But, there are also times when we feel like our prayers are not heard by Christ, times when we leave our prayer session feeling unfulfilled.

St. Ignatius referred to these as times of Consolation and Desolation. Basically, when we feel consoled in prayer our focus turns outward (like a light that shines outward, like Moses’ face shining after speaking with God). And these times don’t happen every time we pray. So we need to remember these moments, so we can refer to them during those times when prayer is not consoling.

And in times of desolation, when we feel our prayers are not being heard, our focus turns inward. For some reason, we’ve come to prayer with our hearts and minds veiled, not open to receiving his guidance or comfort.

Ironically, these are times when we are actually very close to Christ – because we need to pray for his help.

The remedy for this is to pray for Christ’s help and also to seek companionship from your community of faith – wherever they may be – church, work, family. The key is to move outside of our closed minds and be among others. Why? Because when we seek companionship, we are intentionally breaking away from self-focus and allowing the Spirit to help us through those we meet.

This is the power of prayer – it’s life giving and life affirming. It can physically and spiritually transform you.

All you have to do is be willing to unveil your mind and open our heart.

A simple request? At times, yes and other times no.

Is it worth it? Yes. For as St. Paul so poetically wrote, through prayer “all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another”, and that is the image of Christ.