

The Transfiguration of the Lord A/2017

All the readings of this day talk about the transfiguration our Lord Jesus upon the mountain. They show that the transfiguration is the Revelation of the hidden identity of Jesus. They invite us to see in the transfiguration the anticipation of the glory God will give us at the end of time.

The first reading describes the vision of the prophet Daniel about the coming of the Son of man. It compares the bright aspect of the Son of man to the snow and the awesome aspect of his throne to a stream of fire. It shows in particular how all the people of the earth were worshiping him. After that, the text refers to his reception of glory and his dominion over nations and peoples. It recalls how his dominion will be eternal and his kingship indestructible.

What is behind this text is the idea that our Lord will return one day as announced by the prophets and the Scriptures to receive honor and glory. There is also the idea that the return of the Lord will be a time of his crowning in the face of all the peoples and nations of the earth. The last idea is related to the truth that God's kingdom is eternal.

This text sheds light on today's Gospel as it describes the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain. The Gospel starts with Jesus going up the mountain by taking with him Peter, James and John. It describes the transfiguration that happened when they were there. Then, it reports the conversation between Jesus, Moses and Elijah. It also highlights the revelation that took place as a cloud covered them and a voice from heaven that recognized Jesus as the beloved son of the Father and invited the three friends to listen to him.

After that, the Gospel describes the reaction of the disciples by showing how Peter wanted that they build three tents, each one for Jesus, Elijah and Moses. Finally, the Gospel explains Jesus' command to them that they do not talk to anyone about the mystery of his transfiguration.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the hidden identity of Jesus. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. In fact, each one of us has an identity. In order to define that identity, society, as an organized body, attributes to each person what we call an identity card. In that sense, the identity paper is the personification of the individual by which he can legally be recognized.

This document has great value because it distinguishes one individual from another. Without it, we cannot legally be recognized and there can even be confusion about who we are. But, everybody agrees also that this document, as important as it is, cannot replace the individual. Of course, it legally represents the individual, but it is not the individual. The individual exists independently from the paper representing him.

If that is true, it means that even without the identity document, the individual exists. From this example, we learn two things, namely that in each individual there are two faces. There is the visible face that people see and recognize and sometimes identify as that person and not someone else. That is the individual as it appears externally. There is also the invisible face of the person that nobody can see or define, which makes the internal aspect of the individual and which constitutes his true personality.

Such an example clarifies the mystery of the identity of Jesus and the revelation expressed in his transfiguration. In fact, the people who approached Jesus were limited only to one aspect of what they saw from outside. They certainly knew Jesus, but in the external aspect of his life as he appeared to them. In truth, Jesus was more than what they could see. In him, the glory of God was present. It is that glory that has appeared in his transfiguration. The transfiguration has destroyed the wall that prevented people from seeing Jesus in his true identity.

In that sense, we understand that Jesus is not only the one who has to suffer, but also the one in whom the glory of the Father resides. He is not only the son of man, but also the son of God. That vision of things helps understand why Jesus took with him Peter, James and John up the mountain. He wanted them to be the witnesses of the glory that the Father has prepared for him. Therefore, even if he had to go through suffering and death, the meaning of his life was more than the event of his passion.

In the same way, when the disciples will suffer persecution and rejection, they have to know that they are prepared to share in the glory of Jesus. It is not only about the disciples alone, but also all those who will believe in Jesus through the work of the disciples, will participate in the same glory.

That is why the glory that the three friends have seen on the mountain is the glory that awaits us all at the end of our pilgrimage on earth. That glory sheds light on the cross of Jesus and gives meaning to his identity as the one who had to suffer and die in order to rise to new life.

In the same way, we understand that we cannot be true followers of Jesus without accepting our part of the cross. However, whatever might be our hardships and sufferings, these are not the last word of our life. The last word is glory, joy and resurrection. In that sense, the identity of Jesus sheds light on our own identity because, like him, we will reign in the glory of the Father. We will die, but in order to rise to new life.

The fact that, in the transfiguration on the mountain, Jesus appears talking with Moses and Elijah is a sign and an assurance that he is from the line of those important figures of the history of salvation. He is a trustworthy and a dependable person.

Moreover, in him are united the Law and the prophets. Everything people want to know about God's Law and the prophets is in him. That is why the voice from heaven clearly recommended the disciples and, us alike, to listen to him. Let us pray, then, that the Lord may help us to accept with patience the suffering of the present time with the assurance that we are prepared to share in the glory of Jesus in heaven. May God bless you!

Daniel 7: 9-10, 13-14; 2 Peter 1: 16-19; Matthew 17: 1-9

Homily Date: August 6, 2017

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Document Name: 20170806homily.pdf