

Abandon yourself to faith

February 18, 2007

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

On the eve of Lent.....the Last Sunday of the Epiphany, or the 6th of August.....The Feast Of The Transfiguration.....the Gospel appointed for both is the same. The Christian community ascends the *high mountain* with Jesus for what may be called an ecstatic experience.

Matthew's account of the Transfiguration of Our Lord is truly one of the high and Holy moments in the whole magnificent sweep of Biblical history. It was an experience which defies rational description. It was one of those times when Jesus was affirmed as the Lord of Life.

Jesus and his close friends had come to a crisis point in their ministry. They were feeling a great deal of pressure from the religious and political communities. The power structures of that day were leaning on them hard. One day Jesus took Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain, out of the valley, up and

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away from the pressure and the tension, far above the noise and confusion, the hassles and the problems.

Mountains are good places to get away from it all, to gain a new perspective, to find inspiration. It's no wonder that Peter wanted to stay in that rarified atmosphere of the mountain, because at the bottom of the hill, as we can read a little later on, faced with a real human problem, the disciples had proved ineffective. A man had come to them with his epileptic son, imagining that to bring him to the disciples of Jesus would be as satisfactory as bringing him to Jesus himself, but his faith had been shattered by their lack of faith.

People have often come to Christ's followers like this, expecting to receive something from us because we stand for Christ in the world, but because at times they have found us self-centered and uncaring, we have been discredited, and their budding faith has died. All

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of our condemnation of the world can never justify us if we ourselves have failed.

The man with the epileptic son had his faith shaken as our own sometimes is. We come with glorious hopes of what God can do for us as churches and as individuals, but time and our own failure disillusion us and we set boundaries, making rules and regulations and expecting nothing of which we can be sure, so that the sense of vital hope which is the essence of faith is lost. Faith becomes utterly practical, a matter of “Lord, *if* it’s possible” and that’s not faith at all.

Jesus’ answer to this was essentially “*Everything is possible to one who has faith; don’t be afraid; Abandon yourself to faith; don’t be afraid of disappointment or failure, they’re facts of life....but trust in God and let nothing shake your faith.*”

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An interesting question comes out of all this: *Do we care enough for the world and our neighbors in it to have this sort of faith on their behalf?* We often pass judgment on the world for its lack of faith and for its turning away from so-called organized religion, but it is of no use to condemn anyone because they do not believe, anymore than it would have been right to condemn the boy in his convulsions. The disciples wondered why they couldn't help the boy. And we wonder why we can't have more effect on the world.

If we want the world to listen to us, we must measure our concern by Christ's concern, Christ who cared enough to leave the mountain top, where those who were with him were prepared to stay and worship him, to come down to the misery below, and there to carry the burden of his neighbor's distress, and to carry it, in the end, to the Cross. Only those who care as he did can do the work in the world which needs to be done

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in his name; only they can have the hope which echoes his words, *Everything is possible.*

The glory of the Transfiguration for Jesus was not an escape from the world, but a moment of commitment to a greater love and involvement in the world's life. And it was to become so for the disciples, too. They were to pray as he prayed; care as he cared, and it would involve their sharing in his suffering, because those who care for the world like that inevitably do suffer.

We speak of the Transfiguration on this Last Sunday after the Epiphany because it speaks of the *supreme* manifestation of Christ to all humanity. We need this vision. We need it to assure us that Him whom we follow is not simply a good man, vulnerable to the fate of all good people who stand against evil in the world. A merely human Christ is manageable. A merely human Christ we can take or leave according to our

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taste, whim, or convenience. The humanization of Christ, ignoring all else, is his domestication; his domestication is his reduction to impotence. We the Church exist to have faith for the world and that faith, through service, self-giving love and possibly suffering, to take Christ to the world, to take his love to the world and return the kingdoms of the world to the Kingdom of God.

Jesus cared. We are to care. This is the challenge of our faith. It doesn't end with comfortable words in a comfortable place; it doesn't end with the holy vision of the Transfiguration as Peter wanted it to end. The most important part of the Transfiguration is not so much what happened on the mountain, important as that is, but the fact that they were willing to reenter the valley, into places of sin and fear and death....and deal with life and people head on. In that sense, our worship is always meant to be a Transfiguration experience. We gather to be inspired, to gain insight,

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to have Jesus illuminated, to feel a sense of peace. But the real test is when we leave this place and reenter the world out *there*, because, *that*, after all is said and done, is where Christ is proclaimed and lived. May it be ever be so. **AMEN.**