

OK, my nod to St. Patrick's Day. O'Toole and his wife were having an argument about what kind of wallpaper to buy. He said, "You know perfectly well that men have better taste than women." His wife said, "I agree, 'You married me, but look who I married.'"

Mrs. Fitzpatrick was boasting to Mrs. O'Brien about the extent of her wardrobe. "Whenever I'm in the dumps, I get myself a new hat." Mrs. O'Brien said, "I was wondering where you got them."

Casey and Flanagan went mountain climbing in the Alps and got cut off by an avalanche. They were sheltering on a ledge when they saw a St. Bernard dog coming, with a little keg of brandy hanging around his neck. Flanagan said, "Look, here's man's best friend." Casey said, "Yes, and it has a dog with it!"

The Gospel for the Second Sunday of Lent is always an account of Jesus' transfiguration. Each year, it is heard according to the evangelist whose Gospel is featured in that cycle. So today we hear Luke's version of the event. A few words are missing from the beginning of our passage, which tell us that Luke places the event 8 days after Jesus gave the disciples the first of 3 predictions of His upcoming passion, death and resurrection. All of that was more than His followers could take in. So too, His appearance on the mountain was largely beyond the immediate grasp of His closest disciples.

The event of Jesus' transfiguration is full of theological symbols that situate Him in relation to His Jewish tradition, His unique vocation, and His relationship with His Father. It takes place on a mountain, reminiscent of experiences that Elijah and Moses had of meetings with God. Luke's note that this took place about 8 days after the discussion of Jesus' upcoming passion subtly reminds us that the 8th day in the Jewish tradition is the FIRST day of the new creation. With the resurrection – foreshadowed in the Transfiguration, we are given a glimpse of what that new creation will look like.

The essential action of the story is that Jesus was praying. In that moment, communion with His Father caused His very appearance to change. It was as if the reality of who He was in relationship to the Father became tangible, visible. His inner self was manifested through His radiant face, even to the extent that His whole being shone as symbolized by His dazzling white clothing. Nothing but the resurrection could compare to Jesus' physical appearance in this moment; we might say that in both cases, the overwhelming truth of who He was became evident to those who encountered Him.

Moses and Elijah – who appeared with Jesus – two of the holiest men of the tradition, represent the Law and the prophets. We are told that they were speaking with Jesus about His 'exodus,' His 'passing over' to His Father from this world. In other words what Jesus was about to do would be the culmination of God's saving plan in history – bigger even than the original exodus out of Egypt. And just as the exodus saved the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, so Jesus' exodus saves the world from its slavery to sin.

All of this can be understood from 2 vantage points. On one hand, it was obviously a revelation for the disciples who saw it; it told them who Jesus truly was. At the same time, the conversation, combined with the voice that came from heaven, expressed Jesus' complete union with His Father. If we believe that Jesus prayed to understand the Father's will, we can understand His transfiguration as revelation and an affirmation of His role in salvation history. And the voice from heaven revealed all that anyone would ever need to know: "This is my chosen Son: listen to Him." (adapted from CELEBRATION, 17 March 2019, p.3)

Second, so what about us? The Transfiguration is about more than what happens on a mountain, though it behooves us to go to the mountain – if only to see for ourselves and to become what we can

become. To get a view of the people and the reality on the plain below through the eyes of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus.

To follow Christ, to be a Catholic disciple requires a commitment to the bringing of the reign of God, here, now, in our own little worlds. The critical piece is that the story has two parts – first there is the top of the mountain – the place of the encounter with God – the place of prayer. But the second part, in the same chapter, in run-on lines, takes place on the plain below. And it is the living out of this second part that is for us, as it was for the apostles, the real measure of our discipleship.

When Jesus and the disciples came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, suffering people in droves were waiting for them. And the scripture is quite clear why: “I have brought my son to you because he is possessed by a demon....I asked your disciples to expel him, but they were unable to do so.” And the disciples, scripture says, began to ask Jesus privately, “Why is it that we could not expel the demon?” And Jesus told them, “This kind is driven out only by prayer.”

This kind is driven out only by prayer – by insight, by vision, by contemplation and the compassion that comes from it – not simply by getting the words right – but by getting our lives right. The whole life of discipleship requires prayer – ‘putting on the mind of Christ.’ The life of Christ is marked by soul-sightedness, risk, courage, generosity, forgiveness, love. This only comes from prayer. We only know who we truly are through prayer. We only know what God asks of us in this life through prayer. We only fall in love through prayer. And as Deacon Rich said in his homily at daily mass on Friday – Love inspires more than the law requires.

The demons of our selfishness, our ‘what’s in it for me?’ obsession, our inability to see the needs of the poor around us, our begrudging tithes back to the God who gave us everything, and our refusal to see the suffering of the aliens struggling to enter our southern border, this requires prayer. There’s a reason why the scriptures repeatedly use the term ‘hard-hearted.’ It takes a soft heart, an open heart to see the world as Christ sees it. To get the vision that comes from prayer – a life that has been transfigured like the face of Christ. (adapted from Joan Chittister, IN THE HEART OF THE TEMPLE, pps. not noted)

Third, a story of such transfiguration. Michael Gill had it all: a childhood of privilege, a Yale education, a big house in the suburbs, a loving family, and a top job at a New York advertising agency with a high 6-figure salary. Then it all came crashing down: he was downsized from his job; his consulting business failed; an affair ended his marriage and alienated his children; he was diagnosed with a slow-growing brain tumor. 64 years old, Gill had no money, no health insurance, no prospects.

One day, Gill sat in a Manhattan STARBUCKS to enjoy his last affordable luxury – a latte – brooding over his wreck of a life. Out of the blue, the manager of the STARBUCKS, a 28-year-old African American woman named Crystal, half-jokingly offered him a job. With no other prospects, Gill took it.

It was the beginning of a personal transformation for Michael Gill. He writes about it in his book HOW STARBUCKS SAVED MY LIFE. For the first time in his life, Gill was a minority – the only older white guy working with a team of young African-Americans. He was forced to acknowledge his ingrained prejudices and admit to himself that, far from being beneath him, his new job was hard. And his new coworkers, despite having half the education and twice the challenges in life than he had ever faced, were running circles around him.

But as the other *baristas* treated him with respect and kindness, Gill began to feel a new emotion: gratitude. With his defenses down and his sense of entitlement stripped away, a humbler, happier and gentler Michael Gill emerged.

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The title of his book is not hyperbolic: STARBUCKS *saved* Michael Gill's life. He has found true joy in serving people and working with others. He has reconciled with his children. He is happier in his little attic walkup than he ever was in his 25-room house. He writes: "It was hard, terribly hard for me to give up my sense of a special place in the universe....I traded in my pin-striped suit for a green apron, a Master of the Universe costume for something that said I was there to serve – not to rule. I wasn't some know-it-all authority, a pompous lifeguard ordering people around on the beach. I was just another swimmer, now riding a wave I'd never known existed....The gentle love and peace and happiness I feel now I had never experienced before. Maybe the mistakes I had made – causing so much damage – had also helped me to break out of my comfortable cocoon...to get out to a world so much more full of light and life." (CONNECTIONS, Feb 2008) That my friends, as the Transfiguration story shows -- is the purpose of prayer – to live a transfigured life – for the sake of the world, as Christ did. Amen.