

## HOMILY ON THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS 2017

1. Transfiguration – feast of wonder, strange powerful images
  - a. To get at how it touches us, one commentator refers to a poem of Gerard Manley Hopkins
  - b. The poem helps to provide insight into the images of the Transfiguration
    - i. **The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?**
  - c. Hopkins seems to describe the world as alive with God's glory
    - i. It has a power like an electric charge
    - ii. We can see God's brilliance like foil shook out in bright sun
    - iii. God's presence is visible and powerful, as if you were trying to squeeze and crush oil
    - iv. If God's presence is so powerful and wonderful, Hopkins asks why do people not recognize his presence
  - d. We see this image of the grandeur of God in Daniel's vision of heaven
  - e. Among thrones, the Ancient One takes His throne
    - i. Clothing white as snow
    - ii. Hair white as wool
    - iii. Throne flaming with wheels of fire
  - f. This is a vision of God before Creation and after the end of world
    - i. One like a Son of Man approaches the throne
    - ii. He is given dominion, i.e., power and authority
    - iii. All peoples of every language and nation will serve Him
    - iv. Son of man is how Jesus identifies Himself.
2. Before He could be the Son of Man, God had to become one of us
  - a. When Jesus is born, God is entering a very different world than the glory of heaven
  - b. Hopkins describes it in his poem:
    - i. **Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell; the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.**
  - c. I read Hopkins as saying that this world feels the pressure of human work
    - i. For generations, people have been working and toiling in our world
    - ii. Everything is part of trade, is influenced by our work
    - iii. We are so far from nature, that we do not even feel bare soil, because we are shod, i.e., we wear shoes
3. As humans we live in a world corrupted by sin
  - a. Property and labor become occasions of sin
  - b. If I have more property, I will be fearful that someone or something will damage or destroy it
  - c. If I am a laborer there may be the tension of whether I am getting a fair wage
  - d. If I have less than my neighbor, I may become jealous of him

- e. Has more been given to him, even if he is more skilled, was his training a gift
- 4. In the middle of a sinful and Roman-occupied country Jesus went around preaching a freedom in knowing God's love
  - a. He proclaims a God who loves us so much, that we should have no fear in sharing all that we have with each other
  - b. He proclaims a God who will never abandon us
  - c. Even if we sin, God will love us, forgive us and share His life with us
  - d. Proclaiming this kind of God makes people, especially those in authority uncomfortable
  - e. How can we control other people, how can we judge their worthiness, if God will not
- 5. At the time of the Transfiguration, Jesus knows that His life is at risk, that he will be rejected by all authority both the civil authority of the Roman government represented by Pilate
  - a. And the religious authorities represented by the Sanhedrin, including temple priests and prominent Pharisees
  - b. Jesus is probably concerned about His disciples, will they be able to carry on after His death, they who fought over who was more important
  - c. Could they be cohesive enough to recognize Him after the Resurrection
  - d. So Jesus chooses to give them a glimpse of the glory He will have in the Resurrection
  - e. His face shines like the sun and his clothes are like light
  - f. He is talking with Moses, the lawgiver and deliverer of Israel from Egypt
  - g. And with Elijah, the prophet who was taken up into heaven in a fiery chariot
  - h. Seeing Jesus at the center of a conversation with these two great heroes, the disciples recognize Jesus as the Son of Man who is given dominion over the nations
- 6. Hopkins in his poem suggests a similar transfiguration for us in nature
  - a. **And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.**
- 7. Despite the daily grind of work and commerce, when we turn to nature we find refreshment
  - a. Even though we may experience that darkness of night coming upon us in “the last lights of the black West”
  - b. Soon morning appears from the east
  - c. Our ultimate hope is the Holy Spirit who broods over the world
  - d. Like a mother hen with a warm breast and bright wings
- 8. Both the gospel and the poem are promises of hope
  - a. Whether we may face fear or face drudgery, God offers hope in a vision of what will come
  - b. Whether it is the glory of Jesus reality as the Son of Man or the reassurance of the Holy spirit caring for us as a mother hen
  - c. One day we will celebrate the fullness of joy in the union of the Ancient One, the Son of Man in his kingdom and the Holy Spirit nurturing us.