



Transfigured: Anew, Afresh, and Unafraid

Fr. Arnel Aquino, SJ

In graduate studies, I took my lodgings in my religious order's community abroad, which comprised eight houses. One day, a Mexican Jesuit ran back to our house and said, "The American seminarians are going from house to house, removing non-metal vessels from the chapels." From their native cultures, the non-American Jesuits brought chalices, ciboria, and patens, made of ceramic, clay, stone, wood, all exquisitely crafted and sublimely designed. For some strange reason, the American scholastics went on this zealous purge of non-metal vessels one fine day, leaving only the usual silver & gold. The Roman Missal does say that metal vessels are preferred. But they allow vessels of other materials, so long as they don't easily corrupt. Either the zealous seminarians read past the rules they didn't like, or they didn't do their homework. I had asked myself, if Jesus were physically there that day, how would he have countenanced this purge, based on his person, message, and ministry?

Then there was this concelebrated Mass years ago in which our seminarians served. When we processed out of the church, we heard and saw the liturgist berating the seminarians who were all looking at the floor. When I saw them over lunch, I asked them what happened. "Fr. Arnel, we forgot to ring the bell during the 'Holy, Holy, Holy.'" This got me into thinking: there was something terribly wrong here, and it was not in the liturgy.

In the Transfiguration, God showed in no uncertain terms

that his Son was the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets as represented by Moses and Elijah.

The phrase "the Law and the Prophets" was the catch-all term for Israel's entire religious tradition, based on the 10 Commandments but which grew to hundreds of other laws. These rules governed a Jew from the very moment he or she got up at sunrise to one's last wakeful moment after sunset: what to pray, how to wash, whom to avoid, what to not touch, what sacrifices to burn, how often to show up at synagogue, etc. But in the Transfiguration, God showed that the Law and the Prophets were not just rules inked on parchment. The Law and the Prophets had taken the form of a Person, with a beating heart, hands that touched, held, and healed, a breath that gave life, a body that blended in groups of fellow bodies, especially with the poor. From here forward, whatever law you obeyed, whatever prophecy you were told, all of it must mirror how God's beloved Son obeyed them. Contrary to popular thinking, Jesus did not violate an iota of the Law and the Prophets. He fulfilled them the way God had meant them to be fulfilled. How? With utmost care, attention, and priority to human beings and their desperate need for a better life and longing for God.

No wonder God promptly said, "This is my Son whom I have chosen. Listen to him." Meaning: "My Son shows you how I want the Law and the Prophets obeyed." Listen to him *daw*, to his Son. God knows that when we make ourselves the norm of the law, we tend to listen only to ourselves. The next thing we know, we have become harsh to others and yet lenient on ourselves. We impose the letter of the law on others and yet we invoke "Spirit of the law!" as

an alibi when we violate that very law. Worse, when presume ourselves to be the norm of God's law, we become quite exclusivistic, bigoted, holier-than-thou. This is exactly what became of the Pharisees and the Sadducees: they set themselves as the norm for how the Law must be obeyed by all. You could almost hear them say, "Listen to us! Become like us! Transfigure yourselves into us!" To Jesus' eyes, though, they have disfigured the image of God into a ritualistic, legalistic, formalistic, deity.

Ever the carpenter, Jesus went about fixing what the powers-that-be distorted. He told eye-opening parables about God. He extended God's touch by means of his healings. He connected people to God and with each other by teaching them to call God "Father." He forgave sins. And, in a miracle filled with light, God showed Peter, James, and John God's face... in the face of his Son. "This is my beloved Son who pleases me. Listen to him. He is the norm, the image and likeness of how I want you to understand, to interpret, and to follow me."

Sisters and brothers, never mind the non-metal chalices, or whether the bell is rung at all for the "Holy, Holy, Holy," or whether we should receive Communion by hand or by mouth, or whether we should raise our hands for the Our Father... Our Church, the Body of Christ, has more compelling issues that need our study, our discernment, our decision-making, and our constant praying. Artificial intelligence, evangelical & Pentecostal Church expansion, Mother Earth's moan & groan—these and so much more demand new eyes and ears, new hearts and minds from us Catholics. For us to see Jesus' countenance and hear Jesus' voice through all of these bewildering realities, we must be Transfigured: anew, afresh, and unafraid.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians

JOIN with others in being imitators of me, brothers and sisters, and observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us. For many, as I have often told you and now tell you even in tears, conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction. Their God is their stomach; their glory is in their "shame." Their minds are occupied with earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord.

—The word of the Lord.

All —Thanks be to God.

Verse before the Gospel
(Cf. Mt 17:5) (*Stand*)

All—From the shining cloud the Father's voice is heard: This is my beloved Son, hear him.

Gospel (Lk 9:28b–36)

P—A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke
All—Glory to you, O Lord.

JESUS took Peter, John, and James and went up the mountain to pray. While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep, but becoming fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As they were about to part from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good

that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But he did not know what he was saying. While he was still speaking, a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my chosen Son; listen to him." After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. They fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen.

—The Gospel of the Lord.

All—Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily (*Sit*)

Profession of Faith (*Stand*)

All—I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Prayer of the Faithful

P—Father, our covenant with you in Christ is the cause of our hope. Now, we humbly approach your throne, O God, as we lift our supplications to you, we pray:

R—Sustaining God, hear us.

C—For Pope Francis, bishops, priests, deacons, religious men and women: through their faithful witnessing may they carry out with zeal the mission of mercy of Christ. We pray: (**R**)

C—For those who exercise civil authority in our country: may they heed the call of the gospel to protect the sanctity of life and promote love, peace, and justice for all. We pray: (**R**)

C—For the healing of the sick: may they be given the grace of healing and, strength to endure the struggles towards consolation and greater peace. We pray: (**R**)

C—For those who want to repent from their sinful ways: may they approach the grace of mercy and healing through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We pray: (**R**)

C—For the catechumens: may they be firm in their resolve to renounce sin so as to be reborn at the font of life and salvation. We pray: (**R**)

C—May our belief in the resurrection of the body sustain us as we pray and mourn for the death of those whom we love. We pray: (**R**)

C—Let us pray for the urgent concerns of our community and our personal intentions (*pause*). We pray: (**R**)

P—Father, whose mercy endures forever, listen to the prayers of your faithful people, and by the Word of Truth and Spirit of grace prepare us to be cleansed by the Easter mysteries. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All—Amen.



Presentation of the Gifts
(*Stand*)

P—Pray, brethren...

All—May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.

Prayer over the Offerings

P—May this sacrifice, O Lord, we pray, cleanse us of our faults and sanctify your faithful in body and mind for the celebration of the paschal festivities.

Through Christ our Lord.

All—Amen.

Preface: The Transfiguration of the Lord

P—The Lord be with you.

All—And with your spirit.

P—Lift up your hearts.

All—We lift them up to the Lord.

P—Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All—It is right and just.

P—It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord.

For after he had told the disciples of his coming Death, on the holy mountain he manifested to them his glory, to show, even by the testimony of the law and the prophets, that the Passion leads to the glory of the Resurrection.

And so, with the Powers of heaven, we worship you constantly on earth, and before your majesty without end we acclaim:

All—Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. *(Kneel)*

Acclamation *(Stand)*

All—When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again.

THE COMMUNION RITE

The Lord's Prayer

All—Our Father...

P—Deliver us, Lord...

All—For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever.

Invitation to Peace

Invitation to Communion

(Kneel)

P—Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

All—Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under

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my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Communion Antiphon

(Cf. Mt 17:5)

This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.

Prayer after Communion

(Stand)

P—Let us pray. *(Pause)*

As we receive these glorious mysteries, we make thanksgiving to you, O Lord, for allowing us while still on earth to be partakers even now of the things of heaven.

Through Christ our Lord.

All—Amen.

THE CONCLUDING RITES

P—The Lord be with you.

All—And with your spirit.

Prayer over the People

P—Bow down for the blessing.

(Pause)

Bless your faithful, we pray, O Lord, with a blessing that endures forever, and keep them faithful to the Gospel of your Only Begotten Son, so that they may always desire and at last attain that glory whose

beauty he showed in his own Body to the amazement of his Apostles.

Through Christ our Lord.

All—Amen.

P—And may almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, (†) and the Holy Spirit.

All—Amen.

Dismissal

P—The Mass has been offered. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All—Thanks be to God.

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