

From The Pastor

What is it that holds you to faith in God, and Jesus? Faith is the central movement and theme in the readings today, as well as the focus of our Lenten fast. The intention of our Lenten discipline is to focus and deepen our faith and trust in Jesus as we anticipate the renewal of our baptismal promises at Easter. Sometimes the most basic and obvious question is the best place to begin.

What is it that draws you to Jesus? Through your faith in Jesus, what do you hope for, or what promise do you wish to attain? Some hold faith merely because it was passed on from grandparents, to parents, to child. This is only a beginning. A more mature hope of faith would be the promise of eternal life with God after death. Some are drawn to Jesus for love, mercy, forgiveness, and compassion. Others see truth in Jesus as the source and dignity of what it means to be fully human created in love by a God of love.

The point here is that faith is an active relationship of trust that grows and changes as a person moves through the various stages and challenges of life. Faith is not a one size fits all reality that one holds as a life possession. If faith is to be meaningful and alive, it must be open to the changes and vulnerabilities of any life relationship.

This was the case for Jesus as he grew in his relationship with the Father toward the fulfillment of his life's purpose. Today presents us with the dramatic account of the Transfiguration where the glory of God is revealed through the human person of Jesus. Reading this account is powerful enough, but if we look at the preceding verses, we can see an active movement of faith in both Jesus and the disciples.

Ten verses prior to the Transfiguration, Peter makes his profession of faith in response to the Lord's question, 'who do you say that I am?' Peter replies, 'you are the Christ, the Messiah of God.' These verses tell us a lot. Jesus is moving forward in his faith by confirming in himself what he has long perceived. Things become more real, more valid when we are willing to speak them to others. Jesus is convinced he is the Son of God. By asking the disciples who they believe him to be, Jesus is confirming his own inner self-knowing, as well as revealing it to his closest friends. This is a big step for Jesus, and an even bigger one for the disciples.

Following these verses, still before the Transfiguration, Jesus shares for the first time the kind of Messiah he will be. He predicts his passion, suffering, and death. The disciples are shocked and disbelieving. They resist, and try to change the Lord's mind. The faith relationship is changing for all in the scene. Further, Jesus tells them, 'to be my follower you must deny yourself and take up your Cross. The one who would save their life will lose it; while the one who loses their life for my sake will find it.'

Eight days after speaking these words, Jesus is Transfigured and seen in his divine glory. The challenges and the opportunities of growing in faith are exploding before the disciples. The Transfiguration is an action of the Father to affirm the mission and identity of his Son, as He deepens the faith of the disciples through this powerful religious experience. Confused and frightened, the disciples at least know that Jesus is in fact the Son of God.

Part of their confusion and fear is the nature of a strong religious experience, as well as what it might mean for them in the future. Something about seeing Jesus' glory caused the disciples to know that they were to share in this same glory. That could be a fearful realization. The glory of God was made visible in the human Christ; the glory that is the hope and promise of our profession of faith. For Peter, James, and John this is a startling perception. Now the preceding verses come to the fore. With Jesus, the disciples are going to have to learn what it means to die to self and live increasingly for God.

This is our jump off point where our faith must find meaningful and mature expression. We are called to learn how to put aside all that we cling to that is false in us and become more and more the true person of love God has made us to be. This is the maturing from the false self to the true self.

The false self is the self we have made out of fear and ego protection. Much of the false self revolves around the emotional choices we made early in life. Because of painful or wounding experiences, we learned to develop masks and defenses against pain. This is a good thing, and a gift from God. However, if we are still using the same defenses many years later, we are saving our life only as we see it to be, and in fact losing the life of the true person we are called to be in Christ Jesus. This is what the preceding words of Jesus mean as he spoke to the disciples. That which we cling too can hide the true light of Christ that is within us. When we lose our self in faith and trust in Jesus, we can surrender our early fears and pains to him and be free to discover who we really are in his love, mercy, forgiveness, and total acceptance.

The Transfiguration is not only about Jesus. It is also about you and me. We are called to share in his glory through our faith in Jesus, and in the work of dying to our self and becoming the true self Jesus made us to be.