

The Transfiguration: We Experience the Glory of the Lord

The first reading for this Sunday comes from the *Book of the Prophet Daniel*. This book is cast in the days of the Babylonian captivity, the sixth century before Christ, but actually it was written during the Syrian occupation of the Temple and Jerusalem four hundred years later. The people at the time that Daniel was writing were suffering horribly. The Syrian King was Antioches Epiphanes, a name that means "God shining forth." He was on a bit of an ego trip to say the least. Antioches' empire encompassed most of what we call the near East, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Israel, etc. Antioches wanted more. He wanted Egypt. It would turn his empire into the most dominant force in the world. Around the year 165 BC he marched his troops to invade Egypt. Egypt was weak at this time. Syria would have and should have easily conquered them. But a new power emerged as allies to Egypt. A vast army from Rome met the Syrians on the Egyptian border. Their leader literally drew a line in the sand and dared Antioches to cross it. Antioches knew he was outnumbered. Furious, he began the march back home.

On the march home, one of his subject lands received the full weight of his anger. He was told that the people of Israel had not adopted the Greek gods as he had ordered and as all of the other nations had. Antioches responded by having his troops storm Jerusalem, take over the Temple, and place a statue of Zeus in the Holy of Holies. What an abomination! Jews who did hold on to their faith were tortured and killed. All this is recorded in the two *Books of Maccabees*.

The *Book of the Prophet Daniel*, was written during these horrible events. Daniel encouraged the people through the vision of the seventh chapter, from which today's first reading is taken. Daniel sees a great hall, thrones are set up, and the Ancient of Days takes his place. His hair is white, but he is not a feeble old man. He is the dynamic Creator of the Universe. Perhaps this was the creating God as Michelangelo would envisioned him many centuries later when he painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. In Daniel's vision, the heavenly court is convened and the books of history were opened. Then Daniel saw one who was like a Son of Man come down on the clouds of heaven and present himself before the Ancient One. The Ancient One entrusts this one like a Son of Man with dominion, glory and kingship. This one who is like a Son of Man will execute God's plan for his people. Through this vision Daniel tells the suffering people of Israel, suffering under the Syrians, that God is still firmly in control.

Jesus ascends a mountain. He is transfigured. Strange work, transfigured. It basically means that his body became quite different. It shone like the sun. Moses and Elijah appeared to him. They came to discuss God's plan as set forth in his holy Word, in the Law, Moses, and the prophets, Elijah. The people of the New Israel would be persecuted. Jesus himself would be put to death. But nothing, not even death, would prevent Jesus from making God's plan for his people a reality.

God's plan, his new Kingdom, would succeed. His plans always succeed. God wins. He always wins.

This is important for us to keep in mind when we are bombarded with the negativity of the world. We are called to embrace a positive attitude towards life. We are called to Christian optimism. Christian optimism affirms that all will work out in the end. God will draw straight with the crooked lines of life. We see this optimism particularly reflected in the lives of the holy ones, the saints. "Put your trust in God," they tell us. All will work out in the end. His plan will succeed.

So we do our best to be good people, embracing the call we have received from God be it marriage, dedicated single life, the priesthood, etc. We do our best and we trust God to take care of the rest.

Perhaps our trouble is that it takes a tremendous amount of humility to be people of faith. All of us are secretly convinced that we know what is best for us or for our families. Well, it is important that we plan our futures, but it is more important that we entrust our lives to God's plan. It takes humility to recognize that we are dependent on God. We are really acting out of pride when we act as though God's plan for his people is dependent on us. God does not need us. We need God. At the same time, he is aware of our needs. He will care for us. But we have to be open to his way.

The Syrians under Antioches tried to destroy the presence of the People of God from the face of the world. God had another plan for his people. Not only would they not be destroyed. All nations would look towards Israel for the King of Kings.

The forces of evil tried to destroy Jesus. They would put him to death, as predicted in the verses leading to the Transfiguration. The forces of evil would relegate Christianity to a small footnote in history. But God has another plan for his people. Nothing, not even death, would deter the growth of his Kingdom,

God has a plan for you and me. That is why we were created, baptized and confirmed. Certainly his plan is under attack from the forces of a world that reject his presence. Certainly his people are weakened by physical limitations not the least of which is their own heath. But nothing can or will deter God's plan from reaching its fruition.

Today, as every Sunday, we pray for faith. The particular focus of our prayer for faith this Sunday is that we trust God make his plan a reality in our lives. May we be humble enough to allow him to work through us.