



TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD— YEAR A – AUGUST 6, 2017

It is the Feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1-9). This feast day was inserted into our Liturgical Calendar as a major feast by Pope Callistus III in 1457. As such it preempts the Liturgy of Ordinary Time when it falls on a Sunday, as it does today. The transfiguration of Jesus cannot be adequately described to those who weren't there. It must be experienced as it was by Peter, James and John. Their description of that experience falls far short of what actually happened. That spiritual experience is *their secret* between them and God.

I'm reminded of a story about Napoleon that was told to me many years ago. It can now be found on the internet. The author is unknown. It was during the invasion of Russia. Napoleon somehow got separated from his men and was spotted by his enemies, the Russian Cossacks. They chased him through the winding streets. Running for his life Napoleon eventually ducked into a furrier's shop. Gasping for air and talking at the same time he begged the shopkeeper to save him. The furrier said, "Quick hide under that big pile of furs in the corner." Then the furrier made the pile even bigger by throwing more furs on top of Napoleon.

No sooner had he finished when the Russian Cossacks burst into the shop. "Where is he?" they demanded to know. The furrier denied knowing what they were talking about. Despite his protests the Russian Cossacks tore the shop apart trying to find Napoleon. They poked into the pile of furs with their swords missing Napoleon by inches. They eventually gave up and left the shop.

After some time had passed, Napoleon crept out from under the furs, unharmed. Shortly after that, Napoleon's personal guards came into the store. Before Napoleon left, the furrier asked, "Excuse me for asking this question of such a great man, but what was it like to be under the furs, knowing that the next moment could surely be your last? Napoleon became indignant. "How dare you ask such a question of an Emperor?" Immediately he ordered his guards to blindfold the furrier and execute him.

The furrier was dragged out of the shop, blindfolded and placed against the wall. The furrier could see nothing but he could hear the guards shuffling into a line and preparing their rifles. Then he heard Napoleon call out, "Ready!" In that moment, a feeling the shopkeeper could not describe welled up within him. Tears poured down his cheeks. Then he heard, "Aim!"

Suddenly the blindfold was stripped from his eyes. Napoleon stood before him. They were face to face and Napoleon said, "Now you know the answer to your question." The *feeling* cannot be described, it must be experienced. So it is with the transfiguration of Jesus; that moment when the divinity of Jesus was manifested to Peter, James and John.

We will probably never experience a transfiguration (human/divine metamorphosis) here on earth as the three Apostles did. But we will experience *spiritual transformations (metanoia experiences)* in each of our lives. These are the real radical changes in us prompted by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit as we journey toward heaven. Some of them, like the transfiguration of Jesus, defy adequate description to others. These are *our secrets*, - between us and God. Give thanks to the Lord!