

Well today's Gospel from Matthew recounts the mysterious event known as the "Transfiguration," when our Lord Jesus was "transfigured" before the eyes of His closest disciples: Peter, James, and John. Two summers ago, I was blessed to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and one of the sites we visited was Mount Tabor, the mountain in today's Gospel where scholars maintain that the Transfiguration took place. And let me tell you: when Matthew says that Jesus took them up a "high" mountain, he *really* means a "**high**" mountain! Mt. Tabor is just so massive and incredibly high!

With our group, we drove up half of the mountain and we were given the choice to hike up the second half. And of course being the adventurous guy that I am, I decided to trek up the second half of Mt. Tabor with my brother seminarians. I love hiking to begin with, and so it was an awesome hike up the mountain with amazingly scenic views. Yet it certainly wasn't an easy "stroll up the mountain," which made me think that our Lord Jesus, Peter, James, and John must've been pretty physically fit guys with "calves of steel."

As I'm hiking up Mt. Tabor, I couldn't help but think of how much this mountain was a perfect place for Christ and His disciples to pray—it was secluded, peaceful, quiet and it would've been far removed from the local villages and all crowds who were constantly following Jesus.

Once you get to the top of Mt. Tabor, there's a magnificent basilica, which is maintained by the Franciscans. I was blessed to serve as one of the deacons for the mass we celebrated inside the Basilica of the Transfiguration. And I'll never forget the simple prayer I prayed inside that beautiful basilica—"transform me, Lord!" This prayer really overwhelmed me with emotion and for me, strikes at the heart of the meaning of the Transfiguration itself.

Brothers and sisters, our entire Catholic faith is about transformation. And not just *any* transformation! Like I'm not talking about a purely physical transformation that our secular culture is obsessed with—but rather transformation *in Christ—a transformation of the heart and the mind!* This transformation is *defined* by a free rejection of our *old life* of sinfulness and a full embrace of a *new life* in Christ—a new life of freedom, happiness, and peace. In fact, as *His*

disciples, we're called to be *transformed into our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!* This is exactly what the grace-filled work of sanctification *is—to* share in God's own nature and holiness! This is what it means for all of us to be "*adopted sons in* the Son of God!" This is the essence of Christian discipleship—*completely conforming our lives to Christ*, with the help of His grace, and making our Lord Jesus present in the world today by how we live our lives.

In fact, the Transfiguration is a preview of our *own* transformation, which will be *perfectly completed* in Heaven. Yet this transformation can only begin after we truly encounter Jesus in a personal manner. And a critical part of that transformative encounter with our Lord Jesus is heeding the words of our Heavenly Father in today's Gospel: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; *listen to him.*"

Brothers and sisters, in the midst of all of the noise in our daily lives, do we *listen* to our Lord Jesus? Do we heed His saving words to us? Or do we ignore Him and prefer to listen to the sound of our own voice, our own ego, our own selfishness? Do we prefer to listen to the voice of the fallen world, a world tragically consumed by hedonism and

relativism, where all that matters is one's own self-gratification and doing whatever it takes to "feel good."

Transformation in Christ can *only* happen when we humbly *listen* to and then heed the voice of our Lord Jesus, Who *alone* has the words of eternal life. So if this is the case then how can we *practically listen* to our Lord Jesus? Well certainly our Lord isn't restricted in how He can communicate with us. Our Lord can speak to us in our daily lives through other people, events, experiences, etc.

But the *best, most perfect, and most certain* ways we can listen to our Lord Jesus is through prayer and His Catholic Church, most especially through the Church's liturgies, Her sacraments, Her teachings, Her saints, and the divine Magisterial authority exercised by the successors of the Apostles, the bishops, in union with the successor of St. Peter, the Pope.

And how can we forget the inspired Word of God: Sacred Scripture, also known as the Bible, where our Lord and Savior speaks to us directly and personally, through *both* the Old *and* New Testaments—especially in the four Gospels. Brothers and sisters, our Lord Jesus is

the ultimate interpretive key to *all* of Sacred Scripture. The Bible, as it exists in its entirety, exists *solely because of Christ* and His Church, Who compiled the Bible under the careful guidance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in order to *truly listen to* and faithfully heed the words of our Lord Jesus, we must *always* read and interpret the Bible in light of Christ and the teachings of His Church.

Given that it's summer and we all love to do some "summer reading," except maybe the school students, how much have we considered reading a book of the Bible? Have we ever read an entire book from the Bible? Have we ever read the four Gospels in their entirety, even just one of them? Or is our only exposure to God's inspired Word on the weekends when we come to mass? Brothers and sisters, in striving to *listen more* to our Lord Jesus, we cannot neglect Sacred Scripture, which *is* His inspired Word where our Savior speaks to us directly and personally. One of the great Doctors of the Church who lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, St. Jerome, famously said that "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ."

As we prepare to worship and encounter our victorious Savior in the Most Holy Eucharist, the *same man* Who was transfigured before His disciples on Mt. Tabor, let's ask our Lord Jesus for the grace to *listen* to Him more with humble and receptive hearts—to more faithfully *heed* His words, so that He may continue to transform our lives forever.