

Homily for the Feast of the Transfiguration of the LORD
St. Thomas the Apostle Church – West Springfield, Massachusetts
August 6, 2019



Scripture Readings: Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 ✕ Psalm 97:1-2, 5-6, 9 ✕ 2 Peter 1:16-19 ✕ Luke 9:28b-36

 In three separate occasions Jesus invited three people into privileged moments in His life and ministry. They were handpicked, and the three He chose on each occasion were Peter, James and John.

The first occasion was in the home of a synagogue official named Jairus. When this man begged Jesus to come and cure his daughter, she was “desperately sick.” On the way, word came that the girl had died. When Jesus reached the house, He chose Peter, James and John to go with Him into the dead girl’s room. The details of the scene are astonishing: He took the girl by the hand and told her to get up. He then watched her walk around and told those gathered to give her something to eat. Her life was restored as if it was the most natural thing in the world.¹

The second occasion was on the Mount of Transfiguration and it is this occasion that the Church celebrates in today’s feast. While Gethsemane would be of their darkest moments, the Transfiguration would be, by far, the brightest. What frightened the three disciples on the mountain was the overwhelming encounter with the unfamiliar. Here was the Christ as they had not seen Him before; “Dazzling white” in a supernatural way. Adding to the unearthly nature of the experience was the presence of such celebrated figures as Moses and Elijah, who lived longer than others did in the memory of their people, but who, at the same time, had been dead for a long time. Their presence had to be, in some way, an exaltation of Jesus, an exaltation that reached its pinnacle and startled them completely when the voice came down from heaven, saying, “This is my chosen Son; listen to Him.”²

The third occasion was the in Garden of Gethsemane. Again, only Peter, James and John were invited to be with Him. At this point, Jesus

probably didn’t know what He was going to do. He was in a state of fear and anxiety at the possibility of being crucified, so much so that He was tempted to give up on His mission and to free Himself from the threat of the Cross. He said to the three, “My soul is sorrowful even to death.”³ Addressing His Father as He knelt in prayer, He begged, “Take this cup away from me.”⁴ Still, in His fear, He added to this plea “but not what I will but what you will.”⁵ Acceptance of the Father’s will, and the suffering it would cause, wouldn’t be easy for Jesus’ disciples either; they might have slept through His agony in the Garden but they would not be able to sleep through their own suffering. Jesus knew this and said to Simon Peter, “Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test.”⁶

So, what does all this mean? Since the raising of Jairus’s daughter and the Transfiguration came before Gethsemane, and since Jesus involved Peter, James and John on all three occasions, He must have intended the earlier events to carry them through His Passion and Death on the Cross. When the darkness came over them, they would, hopefully, remember the light. The memory of the Transfigured LORD and the risen girl would help them to have courage. They had seen there was something distinctive about this person, Jesus: the One who could raise the dead, was transfigured in light, and emerged from Gethsemane as He did. They had some very strong hints of His divinity.

Let us pray that the faith they gained and have passed on may fill our hearts, minds, and souls, and give us courage as we seek to pass on this same faith to others. ✕

¹ Luke 8:40-42, 49-56

² Luke 9:35

³ Mark 14:34

⁴ Mark 14:36

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mark 14:38