August 6: Transfiguration Year 2 (Mt 17:1-9)

**LISTEN TO HIM**

The Transfiguration is an account of something that happened to Jesus while he was in the company of Peter, James, and John. But what they heard and saw, and what they understood at the time, we cannot tell from the account in its present form. At that time, they saw Jesus in the flesh with their bodily eyes. Later, after his death and resurrection and after Pentecost when they wrote the gospel, they saw him in a total world picture through the eyes of faith. We have both kinds of eyewitness in this gospel account: with physical eyes and with eyes of faith.

Matthew wrote his gospel in his Christian community, the Church. The writer’s starting point is the eyewitness accounts of Peter, James, and John, but he is far more interested in witnessing through the eyes of faith. He wants to spell out the *meaning* of what they saw and heard, not only its meaning for Jesus, but also its meaning for the Christian community, and so for each of us.

Regarding the appearance of Moses, Jesus was like a second Moses, a great leader and one who enjoyed intimate friendship with God. But he was far superior to Moses, even as a lawgiver. Jesus was not satisfied with laying down laws for his people. He also provided the interior spirit for observing his law. He was the first to submit to his own new law: that of love for others and self-renunciation. His obedience even to death on the cross marks the fidelity of Jesus to his people and to God his Father.

The Israelites expected Elijah to return immediately before the appearance of the Messiah and to announce his arrival. Jesus identified John the Baptist as representing Elijah, sent as a messenger before Jesus, the Saviour.

“This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him” (Mt 17:5). This statement sums up the essential meaning of the account. Israel, the Chosen People, had been the sons of God, cared for by their Father. Now Jesus is Israel, the Son, the Beloved. Jesus fully expresses God’s generous invitation to know and love him, and a man’s faithful response. Since we Christians are members of Jesus and the new Israel, now *we* should respond to Jesus and respond like him to God our Father.

So, the gospel writer presents Jesus in the total world picture through the eyes of faith, after the resurrection and after Pentecost. He has filled out the incident that Peter, James, and John witnessed with their bodily eyes, and he has loaded his colourful account with references to the Old Testament, to the Exodus, Mt Sinai, Moses, and Elijah. It should lead us beyond wondering what happened to Jesus while eyewitnesses were present and to share their faith-vision after the event.

After the resurrection, those eyewitnesses realized that the showing of Jesus as God’s Beloved to whom we should listen is also a manifestation of his Church. The Transfiguration didn’t show Jesus as he was then in ordinary life, but as he would be after his death and resurrection. It doesn’t show the Church as we are now but as we will be. The resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee of the resurrection of us as individuals and of his body of believers, the Church.

Let us keep this in mind as we pray the Nicene Creed: “I believe in ...Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God ... He rose again on the third day... I look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.”