

God Speaks to Us Through Everyone and Everything We Encounter

Homily by Fr. Patric Nikolas, Society of the Divine Savior

Prepared with Readings from the Second Sunday in Lent, Year C

As we enter deeper into Lent and encounter the stories of God calling Abraham and Christ's Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor, I am reminded of a hypothesis and an accompanying fact from our Tucson Science Pilgrimage: the idea that water exists on earth due to comet and asteroid collisions, and the existence of the Oort cloud, which is an enormous sphere of comets encompassing our entire solar system. Given that comets are composed largely of ice, with water as a prime ingredient of life, it occurred to me that even in the midst of a darkness we cannot comprehend with our unaided senses, we are always surrounded by vast sources of life. These huge mountains floating in outer space literally contain oceans of potential; in former epochs representing creation by bringing the planet water, and destruction of life as we know it should they collide with our planet again.

Be it for creation or destruction, in scripture mountains are places of divine revelation, such as that which took place on Mt. Tabor, when Jesus was transfigured in the presence of his friends Peter, John, and James. Through setting the natural world as stage for meeting the divine, such encounters recall God's sovereign activity as creator. Like Abraham, we are in awe when we look up at the stars and consider the legacy of our faith, and as Peter, John, and James received divine instruction upon entering the cloud on Mount Tabor, so we, too, enter into relationship with God who uses the natural world to explain our role in the universe to us. While today's readings depict very dramatic and unique encounters with God, they also bring to mind the countless ways we experience him through science.

In saying we experience God through science, I do not mean that research and contemplation are identical types of activity. The more we learn about the natural world through science, however, the more we know about what God has made. My group of seminarians were given many opportunities to discover God this way in Tucson, which

houses the Vatican Observatory at the University. Though not marked by a voice as in Luke's Gospel, our mountaintop experience came with a vision, which we enjoined by gazing at the stars. This pilgrimage of gazing through powerful telescopes, attending lectures and Q & A sessions on astronomy with world-class scientists, visiting the San Xavier Mission and learning about the incredibly impactful life of Jesuit missionary Fr. Eusebio Kino, all transfigured my perspective toward the natural sciences by providing new ways of making the Gospel of Christ present.

We discovered how to evangelize in this manner by drawing on six distinct principles learned during a session on Fr. Kino's missiology. I offer them here as a template for how we can live both with the scientific community, and the general public. First, we show an authentic and unfeigned love for everyone. The whole world is our mission field, and I recommend taking a comparative theology approach when interacting with others. This means looking at another tradition besides our own, finding goodness and truth in it, and allowing the insights we gain to more deeply inform our own faith. In this way we form relationships with people who think differently than we do, and can apply such openness to secular scientists by building relationships with them based on earned trust and genuine interest.

Second, we become people of prayer who not only show interest, but prioritize the needs of others. We do this whether they are people of faith, science, or both, for we stand in human solidarity with everyone. Third, we show this solidarity by working with others in a manner that seeks the common good. The Vatican Observatory employs non-Catholic scientists without hesitation, and in doing so demonstrates a solidarity that does not need unilateral agreement on everything in order to do great things together. It is often best to simply trust God, see Christ in the other, and work toward the common good.

Fourth, we show self-discipline in dealing with others. By providing competent perspectives informed by discipline, we give examples of living faith that can be taken seriously. Fifth, in developing relationships with others we show patience. This means walking with people at their pace, prioritizing listening over speaking, and learning to believe in one another. Sixth, we take confidence in God's plan. God is in charge, and

we ought to perceive Divine Providence not only in the movements of the cosmos, but through all interactions with others, be they scientists or otherwise.

As it was on Mount Tabor, so it is with faith and science. When we allow the light of Christ to shine through the people and circumstances we do not understand, our experience of God magnifies as we face him in person, and through everyone and everything else. Now I leave you with a question to ponder – How is God reaching out to us through everyone and everything we encounter? Do we think that he does this? I believe that he does, and as we progress through Lent and toward Holy Week and Easter, I am confident that if we listen closely from the silence of our hearts, he will speak from the depths and tell us how.