

# On Light and the Transfiguration

Homily by Phong (Paul) Hoang, Priests of the Sacred Heart

## Mark 9:2-9 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

*2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3 and **his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.** 4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5 Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 6 He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7 Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "**This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!**" 8 Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.*

We have all heard of air pollution, water pollution; but have you heard of light pollution? A few months ago, we went on a science pilgrimage in Tucson, Arizona. One of the things we did was going up to visit the National Observatory on Kitt Peak, a mountain with an altitude of 6,877ft to avoid as much light pollution as possible. Our typical night sky in the city is bleached with human lights that make stars harder, if not impossible, to see. The further the star is away from us, the harder it is to detect its faint light. So, we were told to shut down all electronic devices, cover all our cars' headlights, and to only use red flashlight pointers. And I would swing it around like I was Darth Vader every time I had to find my way to the bathroom.

Anyhow, the Gospel today reminded me of Kitt Peak because today Jesus also went up to a high mountain with three of his disciples: Peter, James, and John. Then all of a sudden, "his clothes became dazzling white", so white that they were terrified. And then a voice, presumably from God the Father, told them that Jesus is His beloved Son.

Why did Jesus take them up to the high mountain to reveal himself? Could it be that Jesus was trying to pull them away from their daily human light pollution? I would like to suggest, symbolically of course, that it was not Jesus who transformed, but the three disciples themselves who were transformed to see Jesus in a different light, freed from the pollution of their own human lights: their values, beliefs, judgments about who Jesus is. Only then were they able to recognize and see the divine light that radiated from his clothes.

Are we any different from them? We too look at others through the light of our personal beliefs, values, and even biases that make it difficult to see the divine light and the good in those around us. Often times we judge other people under that same human light. My novice master often said, sarcastically, "The world would be a much better place if everyone is just like me." Raise your hand if you have ever criticized or slandered another person (*raise my hand*) ... the rest of you will be canonized soon. It is a very common sin because people often times do not measure up to our beliefs and values; and in turn we judge and criticize them according to our human light.

I once heard a Jesuit priest prescribing three remedies for these bad habits. 1) Meet others where they are - not where they could be according to the box we built for them in our minds. 2) Think good about others - practice envisioning that they too have some truth to what they believe or do. 3) Talk good about others - this is the hardest part. But if we do it, we will be transformed. These three things will be good for your health, I promise, better than those anxiety pills you are taking. So today I encourage you to go

home and put aside your human light to see the divine light and the good in those around you: your spouse, children, friends, co-workers, etc.

I tell you this because when I returned from Kitt Peak the next day, the sceneries suddenly became brighter to my eyes. I did not realize how much light pollution we have in the city until I saw the pitch-dark sky on Kitt Peak. Every day we too are polluted by our own human light of beliefs, values, and biases. But if we could recognize it to try and see the divine light of Christ in those around us, we too could be transformed like the three disciples.