Sunday, August 6, 2023.

The Transfiguration (call it Transformation) of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Transfiguration is a vision, a foretaste of heaven, a brief glimpse of the true glory of the king, the true identity of Christ. This was a special revelation of Jesus' divinity granted to the three disciples, and it was God's divine affirmation of everything Jesus had done and was about to do.

(Matthew 17: 1-9) After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him, I am well pleased. Listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

According to St Thomas Aquinas, "It was fitting for Christ to manifest his glory to his select apostles because those who walk an arduous path need a clear sense of the goal of their journey". The arduous path that Thomas speaks of is this life, "with all of its attendant sufferings, failures, setbacks, disappointments, anxieties, and injustices. Beset with all this negativity, a pilgrim on life's way can easily succumb to despair unless he is granted a glimpse of the glory that comes at the end of his striving". And this is why St Thomas argues, "Jesus, while on his way to the cross, for a brief moment allows the light to shine through him. Though we live and move within the confines of this world of space and time, we are not meant, finally, for this dimensional system, in a transformed state of existence. The Transfiguration, therefore, awakes our sense of wonder and steels our courage to face the darkness here below."

Why did Christ choose only these three guys among the twelve Apostles? Am not definitely sure, but this is what I know: Peter – is the one who loved Christ the most, John – is the one whom Christ loved the most, and James was the first among the twelve to die for Christ. Like John, we can strive to love Christ, but just be aware that Christ really loves you, and just sit and allow him to love you every day. Christ thus

assures his disciples (and indeed every believer) that their commitment was well placed, and their eternity was secure in heaven.

At his trial, Jesus was questioned before the High Priest – Caiaphas: "But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?" They answered, "He deserves death." (To tear garments is a cultural and tangible expression of great sorrow, grief, and pain inside the person). (Matt 26: 63-66).

When Christ said "From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven", his listeners will remember Daniel chapter 7 (and that is our first reading). They knew exactly the implications of His words. Today we must decide for ourselves whether Jesus' WORDS are blasphemy or true. And our decision has eternal implications. What was Christ's favorite title – **The Son of Man**. The transfiguration is the manifestation, even before the crucifixion and death, of Jesus - his deepest identity.

Second reading: Book of Daniel (7: 9-10, 13-14) "As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands were ministering to him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. I watched them because of the noise of the arrogant words that the horn was speaking. And as I watched, the beast was put to death, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. As I watched in the night visions, I saw **one like the Son of Man** coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed".

Daniel had a vision of 4 beasts (representing world empires) that would reign over Israel, these nations are described as evil and cruel, the fourth and last was Rome. However, Daniel also saw a vision of God's everlasting, indestructible kingdom. Arrive and conquer them all. At the time of Jesus, remember Rome had conquered

Israel, and ruling over them. And they all looked back to the messianic fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy chapter.

Moses and Elijah were the two greatest prophets on the Old Testament. Moses represents the law, he wrote the Pentateuch, while Elijah represents the prophets. Moses and Elijah's presence with Jesus confirmed Jesus' Messianic Mission – to redeem the world.

Christ is more than just a great leader, a good example, a good influence, or a great prophet. He is the Son of God. When you understand this profound truth, the only adequate response is WORSHIP. When you have a correct understanding of Christ, you will obey him.

<u>In our second Reading – St Peter's confirmation</u>:

This is from St Peter the Apostle – a ***direct eyewitness account*** of that special event on top of Mount Tabor:

"For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, ***but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty***. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts". (2 Peter 1: 16-19)

Can we now see how this whole event of the transfiguration impacted St Peter and his friends, like the other events in the life of Christ?

(1) **We experience this transformation <u>at every Mass</u>**: when the priest lifts high the Body of Christ on the altar, and also when we receive Christ at communion. At these moments we are deeply transformed.
(2) **The Transfiguration offers us a message of hope and encouragement**. In moments of doubt and during feelings of despair, suffering, failures, setbacks, disappointments, anxieties, and injustices, the expectation of our transformation in Heaven helps us to reach out to God and listen to His consoling words: "This is my beloved son/daughter in whom I am well pleased."
(3) **We need these 'mountain-top' experiences in our own lives to awaken our sense of wonder**. We can share experiences like those of Peter, James, and John

when we spend some extra time in prayer. Think of the Holy Hour, retreats, and other events like the WYD 2023. Spent some quiet moments before the Blessed Sacrament, before you go to bed at night, or when you wake up in the morning. Those quiet moments could be helpful spiritually and mentally, trust me.

As I write this reflection, I think of Lisbon 2023, the 37th World Youth Day, August 1-6th. (Portugal) According to Zenith News, the 37th WYD taking place in Portugal gather over 1.5 million young people from over 143 countries, with bishops, priests, and Pope Francis. This is awesome! Why this global event? They all gather mainly to praise God in music, listen to inspiring talks from various speakers, pray, and adore our Lord Jesus Christ. Many of these pilgrims have some profound moments of silence – holy hours, and confessions. They all gather to celebrate the Holy Mass with Pope Francis. To God be the Glory. Amen.

Fr Martin Ezeihuaku, MSP.