

Fr. John's Homily for August 6, 2023 - The Transfiguration of the Lord

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This past week I enjoyed a few days away up north. I stayed in a beautiful log cabin and took a few books along thinking I would do some reading and maybe even find some inspiration for this weekend's homily on the Lord's Transfiguration. My inspiration, however, came from a coffee table book that was waiting for me there at the cabin. It was actually a children's book, but it was about the wonderful natural phenomenon of the Monarch butterfly.

Now I am sure you know something about butterflies from your elementary school science classes. They have a mysterious short life in which they go through a couple phases before they become a mature adult. The mom lays eggs on the leaf of a milkweed plant, the eggs hatch and become caterpillars, the caterpillar crawls around for a few days, and then hangs upside down from a branch and something like a cocoon encases them. It's called a *chrysalis*. And then, *in the fullness of time*, the beautiful Monarch butterfly emerges. And at some point after that, and this the most remarkable part of their story, Monarchs from all over North America head south and congregate by the multiple millions to a place called *Michoacán* (not Michigan) in the mountains of central Mexico. It is one of the most incredible events in the animal kingdom.

Well, I learned that this transitional stage from caterpillar to butterfly is called a metamorphosis. Its primary definition has to do with certain bugs, like our caterpillar, but there's a second part of the definition that refers to human beings. The definition is: "*A metamorphosis is a change of one form or nature of a thing, or a person, into a completely different one, by natural, or.... by supernatural means.*"

Well, that was my inspiration. Jesus is something like a butterfly. And He had two transitions, or metamorphoses. One, the one we commemorate today, the *Transfiguration*, and the other, at the very end of his life, where He died on the cross and after three days emerged from His *chrysalis*, His tomb, the *Resurrection*. Both are supernatural events, as was described in the definition.

Now, for those times that Jesus lived and traveled and ate with His Disciples, He was always seen by them as a man. Not a mere man, but a very special man. Yes, probably the Messiah, the one promised by Moses, the one whom it was said, was *coming into the world*. He performed many miracles. Big ones. But, by all appearances, He sure seemed like just one of the guys. He put his pants on, as they say, one leg at a time. There was nothing apparently supernatural about Him. He was natural. He walked and talked, He laughed and cried. It's Jesus, as we have seen depictedin *The Chosen*. The show that emphasizes His humanity.

Someone said they could relate to this Jesus, because He was a Jesus who "blinked his eyes". Earlier depictions of Jesus in the movies show Him as never blinking His eyes. The movie makers use this trick to make the person seem more "other-worldly". More supernatural.

But now as Jesus approaches His final days, He takes His closest disciples, Peter and James and John, up to the top of the mountain and there is transfigured before them. It's a *metamorphosis*. For the very first time, Jesus is seen as supernatural. He is bathed in a bright light and Moses and the prophet Elias are there with Him. And the voice of the Father comes down from heaven. "*This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.*" This was most certainly.... a supernatural event!

This is something different for the Disciples. They had not seen this side of Jesus, and so now they will be somewhat better prepared for those difficult days ahead.

I mentioned that I had taken some other books with me and I did manage to get some inspiration from one of them as well. It was about *The da Vinci Code*. Remember a few years ago there was that book that was made into a blockbuster movie starring Tom Hanks in the lead role. In the preface of the book, the author, Dan Brown, made what appeared to be a definitive statement saying that what followed was based on fact. And a lot of gullible people believed him and began to make presumptions that everything they knew about Jesus was hogwash. Baloney. They would come to believe that the Church they had grown up with had lied to them and we, like sheep, followed the lead of the Church. The book I read was a point-by-point rebuttal of all of their claims. Many Bible scholars who were interviewed weighed in on what the author of *The da Vinci Code* said was factual, and they debunked them, one-by-one.

One example had to do with Dan Brown's reliance on other "gospels" that were written near the beginning of the Christian era. These were called the Gnostic gospels, like the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of James, the Gospel of Mary Magdalen and many others written many years after the first generation. The Church rejected these as heretical. But Brown would have said that they were suppressed by the Church to hide the truth. And what was the truth? I'll give you one example. Jesus was married to Mary Magdalen and then they had a daughter named Sarah. We don't find that in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

And one of the interesting details of those books is that Jesus is frequently depicted as very supernatural from His very beginnings. From childhood. The Gnostic boy child Jesus would have definitely NOT put his pants on one leg at a time. He would have floated above the ground. So the Church had no problem rejecting many of these earlier writings.

Nevertheless, *The da Vinci Code* took a terrible toll on the faith life of many people of our generation. And I am reminded of the warning (which I have shared with you many times) that was given by St. Paul in his letter to Timothy. What did he say? He said, Timothy, "*a time will come when people will no longer follow sound doctrine, but having itching ears, will gather to themselves, false teachers, according to their own lusts, setting aside the truth, in favor of the myth.*"

There have been false teachers in every era of Christianity, and each of them has taken a toll. And they have had many willing and gullible cooperators. That's us. Our challenge is to know our faith. And if we find something out there that challenges our understanding, we need to find the answer. Do some research, ask some questions, download the FORMED app and watch some of the many classes that you find there, read your Bible, and think back on things like the Transfiguration, that *metamorphosis* witnessed by Peter, James and John on the mountaintop, and then later by the other Apostles on that first Easter Sunday.

Do these things, and your faith should remain strong enough to enable you persevere, and to share the *true* good news with those who are confused.

~Fr. John