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## THE TRANSFIGURATION

I had the pleasure of attending seminary in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which meant I had available to me all the benefits of that wonderful city of Boston and the area surrounding it. A number of times, this got me in trouble with my wife, when, after slaving away at Cambridge Trust Company all day, she came home to find a note from me and our best friend telling her we had tooted up to Marblehead or down to Newport for a day's excursion, and, "Be a dear and have drinks ready when we return." I did eventually learn that tack wasn't very wise! But how great that whole area of our country is. Jean and I relish it still, and have been back a number of times to enjoy it.

Now, returning to a past-place for those reasons I can both understand and appreciate. But during my three years there, I often saw return for another reason: seminary graduates returning year after year, some several times a year, in an attempt to re-live their experiences during their seminary days, days which, often enough, I heard from them were their golden days. Wistful looks and excitement as they recounted those days to me; ho-hum or resigned acceptance when they responded to my questions about life in their parishes now. Not only did this sadden me for them. It constructed a regular petition in my prayers: "Dear God, give me golden moments, but no one golden era. Keep me alive to the wonder and possibility in every present and its future, so that I will keep moving and looking forward instead of looking back." So it has been for me.

What of you? A golden time, whose memory makes all other time pale; a golden moment to which, in some way, you seek to return? Our apostolic fathers Peter, James, and John had such a moment, one which put them in danger of turning out as sadly as some of my fellow-seminarians. But blessedly they learned very quickly, even harshly, what such moments are for; and they were protected from becoming stuck in their past and were set free to live fully into their futures. So may we, as we look at them this day. Let's look, and learn.

Prior to his going to Jerusalem where he would be murdered, Jesus went apart to pray. With him, he took Peter, James, and John. So open and unimpeded was the communion between Jesus and his Father, that the energy of the exchange of their life and love became brilliantly, awe-fully visible. Jesus was transfigured. The uncreated light of divinity not only enveloped Jesus; it radiated outward from him, shooting upon and around the three men, fascinating and terrifying them at the same time.

Peter, always the impetuous one, blurts out: "Lord, let us make a monument to this!" Sound familiar? A response not unlike what ours may well have been, eh? For Peter was overwhelmed by what he saw on that mountain. It filled him with a fearsome kind of joy, an aliveness and vibrancy he wanted to keep. And the way he thought he could do this was by building a monument to this moment in which he had been privileged to behold and enjoy the glory of God.

So like us. A “great moment”, a golden period of our life, occurs and our impulse is to do what? Quick-freeze it. We throw up a monument. We take a picture. We try to do just the right things which will recreate the moment or capture its “feel.” So that whenever we wish, whenever life becomes sad or tedious or mundane, we can go back to the monument of the moment and draw out, as if from a bank account, some deposit of its joy.

But it doesn't work, does it ... certainly not for long? All we are left with is a cold-slab of stone. Or a picture, the memory of which can break our hearts, as the memory reminds us of what now is not. Or a spirit growing bitter at the loss of what once was, and anxious of what may never be again.

You see, all great moments, all golden days, have a purpose. But the purpose is not *commemoration*. The purpose is *transformation, transfiguration*: the changing of us so that the joy which broke into our life through the moment might pass through us to others.

In Peter's great moment, his golden day, the first thing which crossed his mind was, “Let us make a monument to this great event!” But even as he spoke, the Father spoke to him, “This is my Son, my chosen; listen to him.”

A bit of a slap of Peter by our Father. Let's unpack its meaning: “No, Peter, that monument business is not what you have just seen and felt is all about. What it *is* about is that this Jesus whom you know and love is my Son. And as my Son he is the One in whose likeness I fashioned you. Therefore, his way of being and doing is the true way for you. So, you must listen to him, learn from him, obey him, follow him. As you do, you shall become more and more like him. And you and I shall draw closer together. Then that joy for which you so long shall be yours always, as it is his, for you shall be capable of dwelling in the joy of our life and love forever.”

The Father did not bless Peter, James, and John with witnessing the joy and glory of his life with his Son in order for them to construct a monument to it. He blessed them with it so that they would know the future into which he was drawing them and all creation through his Son. He blessed them with it so that armed with that knowledge and fed with that joy they then could go down from the mountain top as changed men, not only to tell others of what can be theirs with Jesus but to live it among them, certifying in their own persons that their message of salvation was not a dream, but a fact.

And so it was, for Peter, James, and John. Their golden moment was not the end of their lives, them dragging people back up the mountain to show them a few slabs of cold stone, saying, “This is what happened to me here.” Their golden moment was the beginning of their lives, lives through which others were drawn into the saving embrace of Jesus. No, there were to be no static monuments on the mountain to the Lord of glory. There were to be living, breathing, moving monuments to this Lord in the valleys below.

That is what golden moments are for, whether they be those of Peter, James, and John ... or of you and me. We cannot stay on any mountaintop, nor are we meant to. We cannot freeze in time those great experiences in which our hearts are set free and sing, nor are we meant to. We cannot enshrine the joy and the light that has dawned upon us and entered our souls, nor are we meant to.

No. When God leads us or draws us to any mountaintop, it is for a purpose: *our* transformation, *our* transfiguration, *not* the moment's commemoration. He does this so that we then might go back down into the valleys where most of life is spent, lightening that life for others, and sharing with them what we have tasted, what we have come to know.

I pray for you, as for myself, golden moments, but **no** golden era ... so that each of us may be equipped for our service of God. And by that service be drawn ever forward into that future where all is light and all is love.