

The Holy Spirit Province

NEWSLETTER

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BEING TRANSFIGURED AND TRANSFORMED: 2ND SUNDAY LENT B

How does God want you (and me) to change during this Lent?

St Augustine is one of the most famous saints of the Church. Early in his life he felt drawn to the person of Jesus and to the Christian way of life. But for a long time both lust and pride got in the way of his taking the plunge and getting baptized. Eventually, however, both he and his fifteen-year-old son, born out of marriage, but named *Adeodatus*, meaning Gift of God, were baptized together in the Church of Milan. This took place on April 25th, in the year 387.

Augustine has recorded in his memoirs called the '*Confessions*', two religious experiences that transformed his attitudes and his whole way of life. One has to do with a text from the bible, the other with music.

In the first incident, Augustine has thrown himself under a fig tree. He is depressed to the point of tears at the remembrance of his sins. He asks God how much longer God can put up with him. Then suddenly from a house nearby, he hears the voice of a child calling out over and over again, '*Tolle, lege!* Take it, read it! Take it, read it!' Immediately Augustine stops crying, his whole face lights up, and he goes to the bible to take and read the first words he finds. When he opens the book, his eyes fall on these words of St Paul in his letter to the Romans: 'Let us conduct ourselves properly, as people who live in the light of day - no orgies or drunkenness, no immorality or indecency, no fighting or jealousy. But take up the weapons of the Lord Jesus Christ, and stop paying attention to your sinful nature and satisfying its desires' (Rom 13:13). For Augustine the message is overpowering. He can resist Our Lord no longer.

Sometime later, his determination to live as a Christian is reinforced by a second experience. This time it is the singing of the Christians in the church of Milan. He remembers the deep impression the singing made on him. He says to God in his memoirs: 'I wept at the beauty of your hymns and canticles and was powerfully moved at the sweet sound of your people singing. The sounds flowed into my ears and truth streamed into my heart.'

It is obvious from the gospels that people around Jesus expected him to change all kinds of situations. So, they brought him their children, their sick, their crippled, their mentally deranged, and their other concerns and worries. He healed some. He comforted and supported others. But as a general rule, Jesus did not usher in an age of instant, total, and permanent change of situations. The grass did not grow any greener. The trees did not produce bigger fruits. The wheat in the fields did not yield bigger crops. The rain did

not fall more abundantly. The sun did not shine any brighter.

But some changes did occur, changes in people themselves, including the changes that came over Jesus himself first of all. There on the top of the mountain, he begins to shine like the sun with the splendour and glory of God. In his new condition, he receives encouragement from those great spokespersons for God, Moses, and Elijah. What he hears them saying is this: 'Keep going. Keep up the good work. Persevere with your mission of making the kingdom of God happen. Even if it leads to the agony of the cross, it will end in glory, the glory you are now experiencing.'

Change comes over the friends of Jesus, Peter, James, and John as well, who have seen the change in Jesus and are completely puzzled yet challenged by it. The change that happens to them is deepened when they hear God speaking to them in the voice from the cloud: 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!', i.e. 'Do what he tells you. Put into practice what he teaches.'

From now on, those friends of Jesus see him in a new light. They take him more seriously as the messenger of God and saviour. They also understand that a new world, a better world, must start with them, must start with their heeding that message of God to them: 'Listen to Jesus!'

'Listen to Jesus!' That's a message for you and me too. Is there, e.g., someone right now who is driving us crazy? Is there someone with whom we are fighting? Is there some group that's annoying us? How would Jesus see them? How does Jesus see them? What would Jesus do? What words from him can help us deal with our situation? What do we hear him saying to us?

'Listen to Jesus!' Can we do that especially during our holy communion today, when he comes to us as our light and strength, to change us for the better? Only if we change, can we hope to rise with him to a new, transformed, and glorious life. So, are we ready to change, with the help of God?

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