

**“Listen to Him”**

*And a voice came out of the cloud, saying,  
“This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!” (Luke 9:35).*

Today, we mark the last Sunday in the Epiphany season. This word “epiphany” means to reveal or make known, and, in our readings during this season, we have experienced Epiphany in many ways. In the visit of the Magi, Jesus was revealed as the Savior to the Gentile as well as the Jewish world; we also witnessed the glory of Christ made known in His first miracles; we heard a revelation of fulfillment as Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah and then, with startling clarity, proclaimed that He was the focus of the Old Testament promises and prophecies. All of these epiphanies point to the power of Jesus and the purpose for which he came...and yet none of these manifestations of glory could have prepared the disciples for what they would see on the Mount of Transfiguration.

As our text begins, Peter, James and John have been hand selected by Jesus to journey with Him up the mountain. As far as they knew, Jesus was going up to pray. This wasn't the first time He had done this, nor was it the first time these three followers had accompanied Jesus without the other disciples. But this time, when they arrived at their destination and Jesus began to pray, everything changed. Luke writes, “And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white” (Luke 9:30). Quite literally, in a flash, Jesus had changed and His face and clothing began to glow with a brightness that no earthly light could rival. Then, in addition to His radiant appearance, Moses and Elijah appeared next to Jesus – also, Luke tells us – “in glory” and they began talking with Him about what was going to happen in Jerusalem.

It is a truly extraordinary and amazing event in the life of Jesus, and one that Peter, James and John would never forget. To be face to face with Moses and Elijah as they spoke with Jesus in glory; to be eyewitnesses to the entire history of God's people and promises, personified in these three men; it was more than these shocked disciples could begin to get their heads around, and as Moses and Elijah begin to leave (whatever *that* means!), Peter makes a desperate attempt to preserve this miraculous moment and boldly, foolishly, opens his mouth with an idea that he must have thought would keep these three in their sacred place: “Master,” Peter says, “it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah” (Luke 9:33). And Luke is quick to tell us that Peter didn't have a clue what he was talking about.

And here's where we need to pause. You see, as ridiculous as Peter's suggestion may seem, today, we need to understand that, in every way, Peter speaks for us! Just like Peter, we love to be on top. Life on the mountain is good and we would do just about anything to stay there. Think about this idea as it relates to your life. We want our marriages to be happy and our loved ones to be healthy; we want our jobs to be fulfilling and our kids to be successful; we want our lives to reflect the glorious ideal that we've constructed in our hearts and we work our tails to off to accomplish this bright and shining life, but the problem is...this isn't real life.

Every day we experience disappointments and failures; every day we hear about another marriage breaking up or endure the betrayal of another trust; every day, we get angry with our spouse or frustrated with our kids; and every day the realities of real life leave us desperate and looking for anything that will help us to keep our self-centered, impossible dream alive...and, *please hear this*: these moments are the most critical in our lives, because it is here, in the face of life's setbacks and reversals; it is here in the aftermath of disappointment and loss; it is here in our moment of desperation that we are most severely tempted. We are tempted to turn from the difficulty or ignore the confrontation; we are tempted to flee from failure and condemn weakness; we are tempted by the devil and our own sinful flesh to abandon our

own challenging situations for whatever lie promises us happiness and success. Just like Peter, we are tempted to stay on top of the mountain, rather than face the hard things in valley below.

But, my friends, we are not called to live on the mountaintop...our life is in the valley. This is the meaning of our text, and one of the most important aspects of today's reading is found in the voice of the Father addressing the disciples from "out of the cloud." In response to Peter's arrogant idea, God responds with these words: "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" These words from the Father bear careful examination. You see, this is not simply some general word of advice from God to quiet Peter down. No, this Word from the cloud is a totally specific directive to the disciples – *and to us* – about God's plan for salvation. It is an epiphany that points to the way in which God will be glorified and through which His plan to deliver His people is revealed. And you can't understand this statement from the Father without understanding the first verse of our Gospel reading.

Here, in verse 28, Luke tells us that the trip to the Mount of Transfiguration took place "about eight days after these sayings." It's always awkward when a reading begins by talking about something that happened in a previous verse, and it's easy to just move by it without taking the time to understand the action being referenced. Well, we can't do that here. The information that Luke is highlighting in verse 28 has a direct bearing on the way we understand the voice from the cloud commanding us to listen to the Son, and when we go back and examine "these sayings" from the previous section of Luke's Gospel, this is what we find: Jesus tells His disciples, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Luke 9:22).

Here we find the key to understanding this pivotal story from the life of Christ. This is the epiphany of the Transfiguration! This is the "departure" that Moses and Elijah were discussing with Jesus. The Father says, "Listen to Him!" And when we do, we hear a message about the cross! We hear a message of death! And before the disciples could even begin to digest the message about what lay ahead for *Jesus*, He followed it up with incredibly difficult words about what lay ahead for *them*. Jesus continued: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Luke 9:23–24). What a message!!! Not only would their Messiah be killed, but daily they would experience cross-bearing of their own; daily they would die! *That* was what lay ahead for these men...and that is what we will experience as well.

I know that today, as we sit together in this holy place, some of you are exhausted by life. Some of you are devastated by loss. Some of you are discouraged by illness. Some of you are drowning in broken relationships. Some of you are cracking under the guilt of sin. And, today, some of you honestly don't know how you will go on. My friends, I'm here to tell you that, *today*, this Word of God is for you! The Transfiguration of Jesus was not only an encouragement to Peter, James and John as they faced the horrible reality of the cross, but it is, *in the present*, an encouragement to us as we bear our own.

It takes great courage to bear the cross; to be honest about our failings; to stay with others when they fail us; and it take tremendous faith to repent of our sins and throw ourselves on the mercy of God and our neighbor. And the truth is...this kind of courage and strength of faith doesn't come from inside of us. It can only come when we "listen to Him." It can only come when we die to our sin and lose our life and trust totally in the promise of Christ that just as we are joined with Him in death, we will also rise with Him to life. There is life in this valley, because Christ walks with us and He has promised us that because He carried the cross for us, we can bear our own, and we will live in His glory. Listen to Him and you will hear this promise of God. Amen.

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