

An Ending and a Beginning

A person's life has often been described as a book. A book can be divided into parts and then into chapters. The parts often end with a significant event in the person's life that marks a change in the person or has an impact on their life. It might be a high school graduation; or a marriage; or the death of a loved one; or some other significant event in their life. Whatever it is, we know that there is another chapter; another part to the book; another beginning for the person. Even death is not the ultimate end to a person's story. Through our belief in Jesus Christ and the promises given to us by God, we believe that death is now a transition to another life, an eternal life. There are other traditions that believe in something else for the afterlife, whether it is reincarnation or something else, but again, a person's death is not the end of their story.

The point is, do we see an event in a person's life as an ending or a beginning? The actual answer is that it is both. That is why a graduation ceremony is called a 'commencement' - to emphasize that there is another beginning awaiting the graduating students and that graduating is not an end. The students are transitioning to another chapter in their lives. By now you are probably wondering what all this has to do with today's Gospel reading of the Transfiguration of Jesus.

We often think of this Sunday as being the end of the Epiphany season, a season that is bookended by the Baptism of Jesus by John at the Jordan river and the Transfiguration. Throughout the Epiphany season, we see how Jesus had been revealed to the world as being not only sent by God but that He is divine. Jesus was shown to be able to do those things that only God could do. The

Epiphany season could be looked upon as telling us who Jesus is. The rest of Jesus' story shows us what Jesus has done for us.

It is significant that the words that are heard at Jesus' baptism are nearly the same ones heard at the Transfiguration. The addition of the words from God to "Listen to Him" that is to listen to Jesus shows that this event is for our sake just as much as it is for Jesus' sake. We not only get the 'hints' of Jesus who is from the previous parts of Mark's account, but now we also see the glory of Jesus, a glory that is only attributed to God. We see a lightness that is not blinding, but is eye-opening, a lightness that reveals the truth about Jesus. It is that mountaintop experience that is a true epiphany that allows us to see things for how they really are.

In Mark's Gospel account, we can see that the Transfiguration of Jesus marks a definite milestone for Jesus. Just as His baptism marked the beginning of His public ministry, the Transfiguration marks a change in Jesus' ministry. This event occurs approximately halfway in Mark's telling of Jesus' story. From here, Jesus is set to go to Jerusalem to do the thing which He was sent to do. So, as we see that this is a turning point in Jesus' life, questions arise from it. Questions such as was this more for Jesus or for the apostles? Did Jesus need some kind of reinforcement of His identity so that He could continue with His mission? Were Moses and Elijah there to encourage Jesus to continue? Why were Peter, James and John there?

This event was not only for Jesus but also for the apostles. Remember that Jesus had told them a week before about His upcoming death and resurrection and Peter telling Jesus that God would never let that happen. The apostles then had a week to think about what Jesus had told them. A week to be confused about what they knew who Jesus to be and what He said that He must

do and how that did not mesh with their expectations of the Messiah. So, this mountaintop experience was to set their minds at ease, to assure them that they were expecting too little from God in providing them a Savior, a Messiah.

It is in the persons of Moses and Elijah that the apostles see that in Jesus all of the law, all of the teachings and the words of all the prophets come together and God fulfills all the covenants which God made with the people throughout all of time. Whether Jesus introduced them to the apostles or they carried something that identified who they were, it doesn't really matter. It is that they represent the law and the prophets and that through Jesus everything is fulfilled. It is in this event that Peter, James and John are given more than a glimpse of what God intended. They are given something of an assurance that Jesus knows what is going to happen and that God is in control of the events which will lead to Jesus fulfilling His mission.

While Peter had the urge to build three tents to honor Jesus, Moses and Elijah, Jesus knew that to do what God wanted Him to do, they must come down from that mountain. They had to begin the final part of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. In a way, Peter wanted to be able to control Jesus and who had access to Him. By staying on the mountaintop, Peter could limit access to anyone who wanted to be in Jesus' presence. Peter, in this case, was not unlike those who after being fed with the bread and fish wanted to take Jesus and make Him their king. This is why Jesus also told the disciples not to tell anyone until after the Resurrection, after Jesus did God's will, so that people would not try to keep Jesus for themselves and have Him do what they wanted.

These are important lessons for us to learn as well. We must be willing to accept the fact that what we want may not always be what is best for us. We need to be willing to allow God to be God and follow what God wants. We need to

learn that when one chapter of our lives ends, it does not mean that life is over for us, but that God has something new for us, a new beginning. Regardless of what kind of life-changing event happens to us - whether it is the death of a loved one, the ending of a job, the end of a relationship; we are given the hope that life will continue. This continuation may not be how we envisioned it or planned out for ourselves, but it is what God knows to be best for us. We are also given the assurance that was given at our baptisms - that we are a child of God and that is what defines us, makes us a person. Yes, our other relationships do help to define who we are, but our baptism tells us whose we are. We have the assurance throughout Scripture, especially in Romans 8, that nothing will be able to separate us from God's love for us that is shown through Jesus. A love that extends beyond this life, beyond the grave into eternal life with God.

As we begin to turn our thoughts to the upcoming Lenten season, may we consider all those ways in which we have not lived in the light of Jesus, have misused God's blessing to us, have resisted doing God's will so that our will could be done and may we open our hearts to the many blessings which God has already given us and wants to give us to share with others.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/5iaA99y7neg>

Service: <https://youtu.be/BJBXUaLGcfk>