

Last Epiphany

St. David's

February 14, 2010

is called the Disney effect. People who in any other life circumstance are reserved and dignified, perhaps even stuffy, enter the Magic Kingdom. Before you know it, the land where dreams come true has infected their soul. Suddenly, the boring business executive is acting like a 10 year old. The bean counting accountant is going back for his third ride on Space Mountain. The frozen chosen Episcopalian is singing with the animals at the Country Bear Jamboree. All of them then find themselves in line with their kids, compelled by some mysterious force to buy a pair of mouse ears. When logic returns days later, the person wonders what ever possessed her to buy those ears. She knows darn well that they will end up in a closet at home, never again to see the light of day. But at that moment, she had to do it. She had to have those ears.

What force of the universe compels us to take part in what we would normally call irrational behavior?

Why do we have to have those ears? It is all an attempt to capture the magic, to somehow carry home with us the emotional high we have experienced in the most magical place on earth.

Perhaps better than any other individual in recent history, Walt Disney understood the power of transfiguration. All of the special effects that occur in today's Gospel are the mainstays of Disney magic. The final scene that you just watched from *Beauty and the Beast* contains the same array of dazzling light, the same use of bright white, and of course the metamorphosis of the Beast into a new way of seeing him. Like the apostles in today's Gospel or Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb, Belle is confused enough to question whether the new individual is actually the same person or not. When you visit Disneyland, as our youth did

during General Convention this past July, or Disney World, where more of our youth will perform next month, you are surrounded by the power of transfiguration. Whether it is the dazzling light of the Main Street Electrical Parade, the journey into imagination in Epcot, or the night show Fantasmic!, the same visual images that Aaron and the Israelites experience when Moses comes down from Mt. Sinai; and that the apostles experience on top of the mountain, are happening all around you. There is no doubt about it, transfiguration is cool and it is so fun to experience. It is so cool that we, like Peter, want to purchase it and put it on our heads and then take it home so we can hold onto it forever.

Our desire to capture transfiguration so that we can experience it anytime we want is a very natural reaction for all of us. Who would not want to have a deep spiritual experience like today's every day of their lives? But constant euphoria comes with its own issues. Staying in transfiguration separates us from the real thing. The real thing, as Jesus points out to Peter this morning, when he wants to set up some tents and bask in the glow of this moment forever, is down there. The real thing is found at the end of the Gospel we just heard. The real thing is taking the transfigurations in our own lives and utilizing them to remove the demons from the lives of others.

In other words, wearing mouse ears in the real world wears off pretty quickly. Returning to Disney World every day for the rest of your life may sound like great fun, but in reality, it is exceptionally close to an earthly representation of hell. Imagine, if you will, trapped on *It's a Small World* for the rest of your existence.

It is this same mentality of perpetual transfiguration that causes some of the greatest suffering the world has ever known. Addictions of all kinds are nothing more than our desire to create constant artificial transfigurations. Perpetual transfiguration is our attempt to escape the real world around us. But what we learn in today's Gospel is that the magnificence of Jesus in dazzling white cannot be separated from the broken world in which we live. Transfiguration is

meant to lead us to the demons in our own lives and in the lives of others. Transfiguration is what gives us the power to change the world.

When we look closely at both of the stories of transfiguration that we hear this morning, we also learn something else about these magnificent events. Transfiguration is not meant to be a spectator sport. The point is not that we are agog at the power of divinity, but rather the exact opposite. Notice in our first reading from Exodus, it is not God's face that shines with the radiance of transfiguration, but rather Moses' face. Transfiguration doesn't change God. It changes the way we see God. When we open ourselves to that experience, what that does is change us. It makes us glow with the power of the Holy Spirit and gives us the strength to tackle those demons out there.

That is also what Walt Disney knew so well. The night show *Illuminations* at Epcot is one of the most spectacular displays of light anyone will ever experience. It just screams transfiguration. But the point of the show is not to hypnotize you into stupefaction, but inspire you to greatness in your own life. That is why Walt Disney often said, "If you can dream it, you can do it." The magic of the park from Mr. Disney's perspective was not supposed to be its escape from reality, but its ability to inspire all of us to greatness in our own lives. What Jesus hopes upon hope the apostles will experience today is not just a new way to see him, but a new way to see themselves. Transfiguration, like Disney World, is not something to watch, but something to become. The Greek word that we translate transfiguration is metamorphosis and of course, it is not God that needs to change, it is you and me.

The story of Transfiguration is so dramatic and so cool that it appears in all three Synoptic Gospels.

In each, Jesus is tied directly to his Jewish tradition with the appearance of Moses and Elijah with him. But in Luke's version that we get today, that link is even more conspicuous. Moses and Elijah are speaking to Jesus about his "departure," which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem." The word departure is also translated as exodus, an obvious connection of Jesus

to Moses and the most important event in Jewish history, the liberation of the Hebrews from Egypt and the Pharaoh.

Note that it is not this unbelievable moment of transfiguration that either Moses or Elijah refer to as the liberating moment in Jesus' life. What they say compares to the exodus of the past is still to come. It is what Jesus will ACCOMPLISH in Jerusalem. Again, transfiguration is not the thing. It is the event that changes Jesus and hopefully us to accomplish the thing. That thing is symbolized by the demon that Jesus will immediately expel as soon as he comes down from the mountain. It will occur again when Jesus goes on to feed thousands with some fish and bread. It will be completed when the authorities try to stop Jesus from bringing health and abundance to all by killing him. What they learned instead is that by killing him, they did not prevent liberation at all. Through his resurrection, Christ would still be here to liberate us and inspire us to liberate all those who are still being oppressed.

those of you who have ever felt left out because you have never had a transfiguration experience as powerful as Moses or Jesus or the apostles do today, I ask you to consider where transfiguration leads. The more we are open to a brilliant and dazzling experience of God, the more we feel the pain and suffering of the world. There are no better examples of that than Moses and Jesus. Their transfiguration experiences lead both of them immediately back down the mountain to endure the world's grief on the deepest of levels. It would lead both of them to their own suffering and death. Beloved, be careful for what you ask. Transfiguration is really cool, but the suffering of the world is so intense. One does not come without the other. Just as the apostles are forced to look away because the light of transfiguration is so overpoweringly bright, we will also be forced to look away when the suffering of the world is just too much to bear.

if you are willing to accept one with the other, if you are willing to experience the dazzling highs of transfiguration and the subsequent lows of pain of the world, your face can glow too. Like Moses, like Jesus, you can experience liberation and you can bring that liberation and

happiness to all those around you. If you have any doubt that what happened to Jesus and to Moses can still happen today to you, let us hear one more time from the person who has brought transfiguration and happiness to so many today, Walt Disney. Listen to his own story of transfiguration and liberation.

"Mickey Mouse is, to me, a symbol of independence. He was a means to an end. He popped out of my mind onto a drawing pad . . . on a train ride from Manhattan to Hollywood at a time when business fortunes of my brother Roy and myself were at lowest ebb and disaster seemed right around the corner. Born of necessity, the little fellow literally freed us of immediate worry. He provided the means for expanding our organization . . . and for extending the medium of cartoon animation toward new entertainment levels. He spelled production liberation for us."

Whether we hear it in religious or secular language, the story of transfiguration and its link to liberation are the same. Transfiguration transports us to the pain of the world and the pain of the world inspires us to experience transfiguration. That leads us to liberate ourselves and others, just like Moses did, just like Jesus did, and in a very different way what like Walt Disney did. And it is through that liberation that we also can bring great joy to everyone around us.

All of which takes us right back to those darn ears. Could it be, I wonder, that we are compelled to buy them not just because we want to stay in transfiguration forever, but maybe because, on some level, they represent for us what they symbolized for Walt Disney. Liberation. Release from the pain of the world. The possibility that we too can spread abundance and happiness to a world that desperately needs it. So the next time you see a pair, I urge you to think about today's Gospel. May those ears remind you to give thanks for the transfigurations in your life, no matter how small or large they may have appeared to you. May they also remind you to move beyond those transfigurations, to let them go and not be addicted by them. Don't just be a spectator to those transfigurations either, but let them change you at the core of your being, allowing you to glow so dazzlingly bright that people will ask what happened to you. Allow

those moments to transport you to the pain and suffering of the world. Finally, may those ears give you the courage to liberate yourself and all those around you from the demons of this world, allowing each of us to experience the joy and happiness of the Magic Kingdom, that is the kingdom of God. “Then a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, my Beloved, listen to him!’” Amen.