

TRANSFIGURATION – A (August 6, 2023)

Who can imagine the reaction of Peter, James and John when Jesus' physical appearance became as dazzling as the sun, Moses and Elijah also appeared, and then hearing that voice from the cloud? There is another detail about this amazing event that can get lost in the drama of it all but that has great relevance for us. After the voice from heaven declared that this Jesus is "my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased", the Father then told those three apostles "listen to him." Listen to Jesus—hear, pay attention to what he says. And it only stands to reason that we are not only to listen to Jesus, but also to do what he wants of us.

To listen to Jesus, we need to be aware of his presence, his love for us, and his desire to be in a personal relationship with us. Last weekend I talked a bit about the importance of praying to know God's will for us; today, some further thoughts on that subject. I have found it helpful to consider the question of God's will in a "3-D" way. I don't mean 3-D glasses or anything like that; rather, I mean the 3 D's of our connecting to the will of God. We need to:

- **Desire** God's will,
- **Discern** God's will, and then
- **Do** God's will

Desire, discern, and do the will of God—the three D's.

1. First of all, **desire**—maybe the most important of the three D's. After all, if we are all about ourselves and don't care about anyone else—including God—then we're not even going to bother trying to discern or do the will of God, are we? For this desire to be genuine, we have to do far more than simply pay lip service to the idea. We know what God wants of all of us in many ways—he has given us the Ten Commandments; Jesus has given us his teachings in the gospels, and the Church carries on those teachings and helps us apply them to our own circumstances. But when push comes to shove, we may well balk at God's clearly expressed will for us:

--we know that God's will is for us to forgive those who have hurt us, but we just don't want to forgive that family member or former friend who treated us badly;

--we know God's will for us is to treat each person with dignity and respect, but we want to go to websites that do nothing but pander to our selfish desires;

--we know that God wants us to reach out to those in need, but we'd rather stay in our own private world with our comfortable routines.

St. Teresa of Calcutta—Mother Teresa—is a great example of a genuine desire to do the will of God. When she was 18 years old, she joined the Sisters of Loreto and served in one of their high schools in India for many years and with great peace and fulfillment. In 1946, however, Sister Teresa sensed a very strong 'second call' from God to leave her convent and school and to serve the poorest of the poor. She founded the Missionaries of Charity, and the rest is history—she accomplished great things, she was received the Nobel Peace Prize, and was finally canonized as a saint. All this because Mother Teresa desired the will of God more than anything else, no matter where it led her.

2. Once we decide that we really want to do God's will, the next step is to try to **discern** that divine will—to figure it out as best as we can. This can involve any number of issues as I mentioned last weekend—what career or job or vocation to pursue, how to respond to the diagnosis of a serious illness, or what to do when you can no longer care for your loved one's needs by yourself. Discernment isn't always easy; it is not a precise scientific process. But there are some steps we can take:

--the most important, of course, is prayer: "Lord, what do you want of me here?" And persevere in that prayer—we won't get a quick and sure answer.

--on some issues, discernment can involve consulting Scripture or Church teaching. I think here especially of questions about medical treatment options: what can we do? What should we do? What must be done, or what is not required?

--some have found it helpful to make a list of pros and cons regarding a decision you are thinking about. The very act of writing down such things can be helpful in clarifying our thinking and sorting out our priorities.

--talking over such things with family, close friends, or others who you trust. That was important to me in the early 1980's when I was beginning to think seriously about the priesthood. It took a while for me to work up the courage to even talk about it with anyone else, but once I did it was very helpful. I firmly believe that God can and does speak to us through others; he did for me, and he sure can do it for you.

3. Finally, we must **do**, we need to act. Discernment can't be an indefinite process; we can't sit around and wait for an absolute certainty that may never come. Again, I think back to my discernment time: I really enjoyed my work in Des Moines, but I had this sense that God was calling me to the priesthood. I wasn't sure about it, and I thought I needed a clear, unmistakable message from God: "yes, Jerry, I want you to be a priest." Well, that didn't happen...but ongoing prayer and conversing with close friends led me to finally decide to take some first steps in that direction—which is why I am here now, and gratefully so, as your priest.

Thus the 3-D approach—to desire, to discern, and to do the will of God. Now, do I guarantee that you will always decide correctly or that things will work out perfectly well every time? Of course not; welcome to the human condition. But the key point remains: to put ourselves into God's hands, truly desiring to be an instrument of his will—even when (not 'if', but 'when') we make mistakes or experience some detours along the way. God can and does accompany us and guide us—he directs us and redirects us if necessary to know and do what he wants of us. I can attest to that from a whole lot of personal experience.

One particular prayer has been part of my regular prayer life ever since my Des Moines days when I first learned of it. It's that prayer I had in last weekend's bulletin from St. Ignatius of Loyola; it expresses so well this idea of giving ourselves to the will of God:

"Accept, O Lord, all my freedom. Accept my memory, my mind, and my entire will. Whatever I am or possess you have graciously given me—I give it all back to you to be completely governed by your will. Give me only your love and your grace, and I am rich enough and I ask nothing more."