

Manifested Peace and Assurance

Epiphany is all about how God manifests Himself to His people; how He makes Himself known. We've heard this for the past seven weeks, and we see it in spades in this morning's Gospel lesson. In fact, we get a "four for one" epiphany today, don't we? It's plain as day how Christ reveals His divinity as He is transfigured before the eyes of Peter, James, and John, but God the Father also manifests Himself by speaking. "*This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him!*" Don't forget the fact that Moses and Elijah—representatives of the entire Old Testament people of faith—are revealed to the three disciples as they talk with Jesus about His upcoming "exodus." Think on that. Moses and Elijah were discussing and revealing God's impending plan of salvation with the very One who was about to bring that plan to completion. ***They were speaking with the plan-made-flesh.*** Here atop this mountain Almighty God is essentially pulling out all the stops and "pulling back the veil," revealing to His disciples in no uncertain terms who this Jesus really and truly is—***the Almighty God, their Lord and Savior, in the flesh.***

Now... keep in mind that it was only a mere eight days before this miraculous Transfiguration that St. Peter actually ***rebuked*** Jesus when Jesus began to tell them of the necessity of His journey to Jerusalem and how it was necessary that He suffer and be killed and on the third day rise again (the very 'exodus' plan of salvation that Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were talking about at the Transfiguration). Again, think on that. Jesus was already revealing to them—in no uncertain terms—how the whole plan of salvation was going to play out. "*Not on my watch, Jesus! This will never happen as long as I have something to say about it!*" Imagine: Peter believes that Jesus is his God and Lord ("You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," which he confessed only a few days earlier), and yet he was now ***hell-bent*** on making sure that the Lord didn't do the very thing He was sent to do. (And—yes—I say this very purposefully. "*Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me. You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.*" Peter was truly ***hell-bent*** on "saving" Jesus.)

It all makes sense now, doesn't it? The clarity of 20/20 hindsight is like that. From our vantage point, on this side of the cross, we understand that this is precisely why God pulls back the veil on the divinity of Christ on that mountaintop. God **wants** these men to see and to know—before all the terrors of Christ's suffering and death commence—that Jesus not only has God's favor, but He is, in fact, ***fully God.*** And as Almighty God in-the-flesh, all that is about to go down in the days and weeks to come is all part of His good and gracious will. It's all a very necessary part of His plan for our salvation. "*God works all things for the good of those who love Him,*" right? He is showing these yahoos that even though everything in their lives is about to look like it has come undone and gone off the rails, ***He's in absolute control. He knows what He's doing, and this is all***

part of His good and gracious will. It's all part of His plan; the plan for their salvation. *"This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him!"*

And yet...we know how this plays out, don't we? The disciples see with their own eyes this miraculous display of divine power and glory and Life; they hear with their own ears how all of this [*the cross*] was all part of the "exodus plan" from the get-go (the planned exodus from bondage to freedom; from death to life), and yet they aren't gathered around that Good Friday cross praising God for their salvation as the sacrifice for all their sin is being lifted up and put on full display. No. They're in hiding. They've seen all they needed to see, and they're terrified. ***Life doesn't go according to their plan, and they hit the ejection seat.*** Even as these horrific events (all necessary parts of God's plan of salvation) were playing out, the great St. Peter tried, not once but three times, to save his own hide, denying that he even knew Jesus. Of course, we don't even have to look that far out to see how the disciples already fail in the command to listen to Jesus. St. Peter is still shaking out the cobwebs on the Transfiguration mount when he tells Jesus that he and the boys will construct three tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah so that they can stay put and start setting up shop for the revolution to begin. The heavenly Father, in His mercy, interrupts Peter in the midst of his foolishness. *"This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him."* Sadly, Peter is too busy talking, ***dictating his plans for God***, to actually listen to what Jesus has said and will say.

Now, like I said a few moments ago, we're standing on this side of the cross. We know the rest of the story, don't we? We know and understand the ***absolute necessity*** of Christ's suffering and death. Knowing what we know, we would have no problem in telling Peter to just "shut up!" But...not so fast. Are we really any different? God is always working ALL things for the good of those who love Him, right? It's easy to say. It's easy to believe... when things are going well. However, it's not so easy to believe when things aren't exactly going to plan—our plan. In fact, it's very difficult to believe that God is working in/through our suffering for our good and for the good of all those who love Him. Suffering rears its ugly head in our lives, and the first words out of our mouths aren't praise, but cries of woe. *"Why, God?! Why this? Why now? Why me?"* As if God has somehow made a mistake. He must have, right? Why else would you be suffering? Look around at this dark and shadowy vale of tears we call "home." Wars, rumors of wars, plagues, civil unrest... you know... all the stuff described in Scripture. That's just this past week! What about the last couple of years? Who here has praised God for the "good" of COVID and all the attendant madness that has been borne out of it? What about the personal crosses you're bearing? *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!"* ***Yeah... not quite.***

Before you go full-pity party, look around. Look at all that God has so graciously revealed to you regarding His love for you and His very real Immanuel presence with you. Look to the font. Look to the altar. Look to the pulpit, lectern, and rail. ***Here is the Lord; the same Lord Christ who stood atop that mountain in***

all His transfigured glory. He's not here in wrath to strike you down or punish you. He's here with you and for you in love. *"This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him."* Now, from this vantage point, do we behold the **full** glory of God? ***And that's where the problems arise.*** We don't see Christ. We see only the veil. We see only ordinary elements. We see only ordinary men speaking and administering these ordinary elements in rather ordinary and unspectacular ways. The heavens don't rend. No heavenly cloud. No booming voice from heaven. No radiated glory. **None of that.** Honestly, though: ***Would we really want all that?*** After all, it's much easier to keep doing what we want to do when the veil is up. It's a whole lot easier to justify our sin against God when it's not so obvious that our Lord is right here...with us and for us. We would ***never*** blow off Jesus... but it's not so difficult to blow off church, is it? We would ***never*** blow off Jesus, but it's not so difficult to blow off His rather plain and ordinary looking means of grace.

But rather than continue down this road, let us do something "radical." Our heavenly Father's command rings just as true for us today as it did for those men on that mountaintop so long ago. ***Listen to Him!*** It's a humble thing that certainly doesn't come natural to us children of Adam, I know. We much rather prefer to blame God for our woes and sorrows. We much rather prefer to tell God how to do His job. *"This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him."* By God's grace, through the working of His Holy Spirit, we're able to do just that. Look to the necessary cross of your Lord and Savior. Look and ***LISTEN*** to what He declares from this mountaintop: *"It is finished!"* It is finished. Listen to Him, for it is this mountaintop victory that He brings to us in, with, and under His veiled elements of Word, Water, Bread and Wine. Listen to His holy Word. *"Do you not know that all of us who are baptized are baptized into His death and resurrection?"* His victory is our victory; the ***cruciform, side-pierced victory*** that He brings to us and bestows upon us through the washing of water with the Word. Even in the midst of all the sorrow and despair and anxiety and sickness and anger and fear; even as the drums of war seem to bang louder and faster every passing day, ***we're already the victors.*** **Don't trust your eyes. Trust your ears. Listen to Him.** *"Take and eat; take and drink; this IS My body and blood, for the forgiveness of all your sin. As often as you do this, remember what I have said."* *"Depart in peace. Your sins are forgiven."* Listen to Him, for it is through the listening of faith that the Holy Spirit opens our eyes of faith to see and recognize and hold fast to our Lord and Savior in our very midst; our loving and gracious Immanuel. It is through the gracious working of the Holy Spirit in faith that we're able to recognize our Lord's face shining upon us in mercy and grace, love and peace.

Folks: ***Here is Christ. Listen to Him,*** for He says and does all these things simply because He loves you. He has promised to never leave you nor forsake you. He has promised to abide with you always, even to the end of the age. Well... here He is, just like He promises, and He's doing exactly what He promises to do. In fact, like He says, He's working **ALL** things for your good and

for the good of all those who love Him. Here's the proof [*the cross*]. May this very real and very present Immanuel, made manifest in your very hearing, recognized and apprehended through the God-given gift that is saving faith, be your joy, your peace, and your blessed assurance, in both good times and in bad times, in sickness, in health, richer, poorer, for better, for worse, and everything in between, now and into all eternity... **AMEN.**