

TRANSFIGURATION

MARCH 17, 2019

To transfigure is to transform into something more beautiful or elevated. In the case of Jesus, ‘transform’ is to be understood as to bring about a dramatic change in the appearance rather than the substance. One moment he appears to be a normal looking human being, the next he is glorified when unveiled in a heavenly light. In actuality, Jesus is shown to his three apostles to be as he is, namely, a man anointed with the Holy Spirit. To be clear, our Lord is shown not as he will appear immediately after his resurrection (which is transitory), but as he is in truth, both then and now.

Since you and I as Christians are anointed with the same Spirit, the transfiguration also shows us as we are. Paul states this fact clearly in our Epistle reading from Philippians: *Our citizenship even now is in heaven ... for he has changed our lowly body to conform with his glorified body.* For sure, we do not yet fully perceive this change in ourselves or in those around us. Nonetheless, we are assured that it has already taken place at our baptism. As we live out our lives in time, we await the unfolding to our mind of this truth; a revelation which will achieve full stability only at the moment of our resurrection.

By *lowly body*, Paul refers to that body we are now attached to and identify with. It is this identification with blocks our awareness of what we have become in Christ; a belief which keeps us subject to the perceived ills of corruption, sickness and death. By *glorified body* he means that body

which in fact we already inhabit in and through Christ. When we become fully aware of our new creation, we will truly and eternally know ourselves as we are.

There is without doubt here a paradoxical strain between that which we think we are and that which we have become in Christ. This apparent split is representative of the now existent dichotomy between perception and knowledge; the former (all we can presently experience) being partial and all too fluid, and the latter (our eventual state) not yet being realized. Yet this is the nature of the world we now seem to inhabit and why Paul emphasizes that our true home cannot be found in the quotidian realities we are typically immersed in and bound by. Indeed, this tension between what we perceive and what is ultimately real, is demonstrated by the sacrament of the Eucharist whose discernible body is but lowly bread and wine, but whose glorified reality is the resurrected substance of heaven.