

Homily 8-6-17

The Transfiguration is meant to be a story of hope for us. The disciples will soon see their master betrayed, arrested, condemned and crucified. Jesus gives them this opportunity to see his glory to prepare them for this supreme trial of their faith when the shadow of death comes to our blessed Lord. The disciples are called to remember the Transfiguration and draw hope from that experience. They are to remember God's words of blessedness and peace. The Transfiguration is given to us to help us walk the way of the cross.

These are difficult days. We live in practically a neo-pagan society. So I'm going to preach today on the virtue of hope. We need an awful lot of that today. But, you know as I say that, we use the word hope for a great number of things. It's almost as if we need more than one word for hope in the English language. Someone says, "I hope my team wins". And someone who is dying says, "I hope I enter into eternal life". The same word hope. But what it means is so vastly different. So let's take a look at the word hope. Let's start out with what it does not mean.

There is such a thing as bad hope. A bank robber hops into his getaway car and begins to make his escape. The cops begin to chase him and the bank robber says, "I sure hope the cops don't catch me". That's bad hope. A pickpocket is on a crowded street corner. He walks up behind his next victim and, as he is about to pick the person's pocket he says, "I sure hope this wallet has a lot of money in it". That's bad hope. That's not the kind of hope we are talking about.

Then there's another kind of hope. We will call it a neutral hope. It's not so bad; but it's not so good, either. Yet these are the hopes many people spend too much time on. We've all done it, especially when we were young. For example the athlete prays, "I hope my team wins". I sometimes get a kick out of reading the headlines of sporting events in Catholic newspapers where two Catholic schools have played each other. The headline reads something like this -- Christ the King destroys Holy Family. And I wonder what does that mean? Did our Lord have a fight with Mary and Joseph? Or St. Vincent kills St. Charles. Are the saints fighting with each other in heaven these days? In a way it's kind of comical. But you can be pretty sure that players on both sides are praying that their team wins. What's God to do? Praying simply to win a game is kind of a silly hope. If you want to hope for something about an athletic event, try this. Hope that the people involved will grow in character, strength teamwork, reliability. After all, the real nature of athletics is supposed to build character. Character building is a good thing to hope for. There are other kinds of neutral hopes, too. They're not bad; but they are not always so good, either. Someone says, "I hope it doesn't rain on our picnic". Fine, but remember, there may be a farmer in your town who needs rain for the crops

or else he will suffer a bad harvest and have no money to buy food. You don't want rain but the farmer does.

So what is virtuous hope, the kind of hope at the heart of the Transfiguration? It cannot be a concern just for the things of this world, although some of them are good hopes. I hope for peace, for decent housing, for my daily bread. Those are good. But if we spend all our time hoping for material things, someday our hopes will be dashed and we will be disappointed. Jesus said to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Real Christian hope always contains the element of the otherworldly. It is a hope for heaven, for eternal life. And it is also the belief that God brings good out of evil. We need to drill that thought into ourselves time and again. If we do our best, if we go on in the difficulties of life with hope, and we trust in the Lord, he will bring good out of evil. There are people listening to me who have suffered a great deal in life. Life has been hard and difficult; but you go on with hope in the Lord. We must hope in something that cannot be taken away, something that cannot be destroyed-- hope placed on God and of finally coming into his heavenly kingdom in eternal life.

God love you!