



Last Sunday after Epiphany (C)
February 14, 2010
Luke 9:28-36
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and Redeemer. Amen.

What does it mean to be in the presence of God? What does it mean for us on this the last Sunday after Epiphany and on the threshold of Lent and Ash Wednesday?

We've come to the end of the season of light that we call Epiphany. On one end, there was Christmas, the day when the Light of the World bringing life, healing and salvation. Today, we conclude the season of light with wonderful passages from scripture. Today, we will ask God to bless Vestry members, those leaving and entering the Vestry, and we give thanks for their commitment and service to God that is at the very core of what it means to be a member of the Vestry in the Episcopal Tradition.

Oh and then, there's Valentine's Day, when we celebrate those near and dear to our hearts. Is God near and dear to your heart? Is it possible for us to step back and look deep inside ourselves and utter very simply, "O God, I love you?"

How can we make sense of all these things competing for our attention while also centering our thoughts on the Gospel for today, that familiar story of the Transfiguration of Jesus? It was a mountain top experience for him as well as Peter, James and John, an experience of being in the *presence* of God.

Moses certainly understood what that meant. He went up the mountain to be in the presence of God, to experience an intense presence of God so much so that the skin of his face was radiant with the light of God. God communicated with Moses during those intense encounters that resulted in the Ten Commandments of God.

Jesus certainly understood what it meant to be in the presence of God. He went up the mountain with Peter, James and John to be in the presence of his Father. He experienced such an intense presence that the "appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white." While there and in the presence of his Father, Moses and Elijah, the voice of God said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

Now, we could spend time talking about the theological significance of Moses and Elijah being there. Jesus, the fulfillment of the prophets of old, was not their equal but was superior to them. God's voice made that clear.

Peter, James and John, though sleepy, were moved by the experience of being in the presence of the transfigured Jesus. Artwork as on the cover of our bulletin has given us many wonderfully inspired images of what artists have interpreted of this event in the life of Jesus. At that moment in time, it became clearer to Peter, James and John of just who Jesus was: The Chosen One of God. They were to be silent and listen to him.

This past week, I discovered an interesting website as I researched and thought about the concept of ‘being in the presence of God.’ The website is www.PracticeGodsPresence.com. That’s right, seems a bit on the corny side but it is a website devoted to what it means to practice being in God’s presence.

The site is guided by a Brother Lawrence, who must surely be a gentle and tender soul and who has experienced what it means to be in communion with God. The website says that “To practice the presence of God, we walk before God simply, in faith, with humility, and with love. We engage in a continual, silent, and affectionate conversation with God. Out of love for God, we strive to do nothing and think nothing which may displease God.”

At the core of this statement for me is the tremendous challenge to “engage in a continual, silent and affectionate conversation with God.” I wondered what that means to me in my life, my busy life of working more hours a week than I can count, my crazy life of trying to serve God as a priest in the Church while also working at the College where I spend a great deal of time.

As an extrovert, engaging in silence is really tough for me. Last week after the adult forum that I led at Trinity Church, Concord, an older gentleman asked me if I had ever read a book entitled, *Silence*. I had just spent fifty minutes engaging about fifty parishioners in a quick-paced conversation about what it means to be an Episcopalian in today’s world. I don’t think I could have possibly been more engaging and dialogical, but also perhaps too something or other as well. I wasn’t sure how to interpret his question.

What became clear to me was that it got me thinking about *silence* before God, about engaging in a silent and affectionate conversation with God. I don’t do that well. Do you?

I do believe that we called to a spiritual life in which we engage in a continual, silent, and affectionate conversation with God. More often than not, we find ourselves engaged in a continual, talkative and one-sided conversation with God, asking for this or that, and leaving little room for God’s voice to be heard in response.

If you are like I am, there are certainly times in life when I don’t really want to hear what God has to say. That might mean making serious changes in life. That might mean taking the call to discipleship even more seriously, becoming a person of genuine peace, justice and compassion for all people in every situation, at home, at the office, in a classroom, at the supermarket. I’m not sure I’m really ready for that. Are you?

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday this week. We will celebrate the beginning of the Season of Lent with Eucharist and the imposition of ashes at 12:00 and at 7:00. I invite you to begin Lent with me here and to ponder what Lent might be like engaged in a continual and affectionate relationship with God.

How will you mark the Season of Lent this year? What can you do to be even more faithful to being in the presence of God? What will you do at home or at work to be tapped into God in special ways during Lent, a kind of deeper consciousness of God? Worship more often? Pray, more? Reflect, more? Read the scriptures, more? Make more room for God in order to be in the presence of God simply, in faith, with humility, and in love? If so, then, anticipate transformation, and I believe it will happen. Amen!