

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I have to admit that being even older than the “Baby Boom Generation” and that’s really old, you younger people of this digital age confuse me. On the one hand you can’t stop talking about yourselves, giving up even the most intimate details of your lives, on facebook and twitter and snapchat. You even take selfies of yourselves in weird, stupid, or even damaging ways, and blast them out to family, friends, and even complete strangers. Yet, at the same time, you often use these same platforms to mask who you really are by using fake names or false or imagined identities.

However, the truth is for most of us of whatever age or generation only reveal who we really are to those we trust to accept us for who we are. That’s true of Jesus too.

According to the account given us in St. Matthew’s Gospel, what precedes this event we read about today, Jesus asked his disciples, first who did people say that he was, and, then, who did they say that he was. Peter then made his great profession of faith: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” The Lord then goes on to explain what this meant. He told them “that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised.” Peter then rebels at the very thought of it: “God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you.” Jesus then turns on Peter, whom he had just given “the keys of the kingdom of heaven”, and with obvious anger, hollers at Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.”

Apparently these two best friends found themselves at odds with each other for almost a whole week; Peter rebelling at the thought that Jesus should have to suffer and die; Jesus frustrated that his friend really doesn’t know him at all and what he is trying to accomplish.

So, it was, after a week of fuming and frustration, that Matthew tells us that Jesus took his best friends, Peter, James, and John, up the highest mountain and here showed them who he really was: “his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light”. Then, Matthew says, “Behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him.”

In using that word, “Behold!” he’s saying, “Can you believe it! Oh my God! Wow! Look who it is, Moses and Elijah, the two ancients that nobody ever saw die, talking to Jesus. Once again, Peter is beside himself. He really doesn’t know what to say. But he has to say something. He has to do something. Finally, he stammers, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Now, he sees Jesus for who He really is and Peter wants to stay there forever, just being in the presence of such majesty, such holiness, such greatness.

But God knew that Peter still really didn't get it. He didn't understand. So, God Himself makes his presence known, and again, "Behold!" "Oh my God!" "Wow!" "a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.""

What do you do when you are confronted by the all-high, the all-holy, almighty God Himself? You fall to the ground and hide your face in fear and trembling. At least, that's what Peter, James, and John did.

The Lord understands their fear. He goes to them and touches them gently and calms them. Apparently they started making their way down the mountain in silence, each trying to wrap their minds around what they had just witnessed. It was probably when they were near the bottom of the mountain that the Lord finally speaks. He has shown his best friends who he really is. He hopes they understand and that they'll accept him for who he is. He has prepared them for what is to come. He thinks that they are ready. But he knows not everyone is. So, he tells them, "Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Now, what does this vision have to do with us. First of all, we get a first person account of it from St. Peter in his Second Letter, Chapter 1, verses 17 & 18. This attests to the truth of the vision. But, more to the point, the fact that the Lord can reveal Himself for who He really is, it should encourage us to be true to ourselves as well.

Most of us mask our true identity. We are afraid to reveal ourselves for who we really are because we don't want to be rejected. The truth is that all too many of us do not believe in our own lovability. So we put on masks that we believe will make us more acceptable to our families, our friends, our co-workers, and classmates. We are apt to "put on a front" that we believe will gain us greater approval or acceptance.

When we do that, we sometimes lose sight of who we really are or we become frustrated because we think that those whom we love, don't really know us, and possibly wouldn't like us if they did. So our tendency is to withdraw further and further into ourselves and we become miserable. We become angry, short-tempered, surly, and even depressed. We tend to push away people we love because we are so afraid of rejection. And some even try to escape the fear and the self-loathing by drinking too much or falling victim to drug addictions.

So, what are we to do?

I would like to propose for your consideration that Jesus didn't go up on that mountain just for the sake of Peter, James, and John. He went up there to be reassured of his true identity. He needed to hear, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," to give himself the courage, the strength, and the stamina to go on to Jerusalem and ultimately the Cross of Calvary.

Perhaps that is what each of us might consider doing during these days of Lent. Find that mountain where we can be alone with the God of our creation, the God of our salvation, the God of our sanctification, and listen to Him speak those words of reassurance to each of us, "You are my beloved Son, You are my precious Daughter, with whom I am well pleased."