

Pastoral reflection – Feast of the Transfiguration, August 6

There is a grotesque symmetry between today's readings for the Feast of the Transfiguration and what took place on this date in Hiroshima 78 years ago. Each reading conjures up light or fire and the gospel references how "a bright cloud casts a shadow over them." Today brings into glaring contrast a juxtaposition that is everywhere in the biblical story: it is the opposition of the power of God and the power of humankind, the contradiction of God's offer of liberation and humankind's penchant for destruction, the competing narratives of our faith and the world and what it means to embrace life or wield death.

The gospel passage is rife with images meant to invoke awe, and yet it is the two rather quiet, mundane utterances upon which our focus should fall. The first is the voice from the cloud, speaking to the disciples: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." It's a simple ask, nothing grand or extravagant about it. For those of us who would be followers of this Jesus, our discipleship begins with this simple injunction: "listen to him."

And yet much of the evidence given by Jesus' so-called followers seems to suggest a failure to do even this. Our mangling of Jesus' message to suit our own opinions and beliefs—political, cultural, economic, and otherwise—shows that Christians everywhere seem to not have listened to Jesus at all: not about the corrosive effects of money; not about seeing Jesus' presence in the impoverished, sick, forgotten, marginalized; not about the temptations of worldly power and status; not about living lives that critique the culture in which we live while bearing witness to an alternate reality of love, justice, peace, nonviolence and solidarity that Jesus called the reign of God.

Hiroshima echoes as the booming assertion of how we have failed to listen to Jesus, where our worship of worldly power leads and the twisted logic that enables then justifies the killing of hundreds of thousands in fire and blinding light in an instant.

The second utterance is from Jesus himself to the disciples as they cast their faces to the ground, frozen in fear at the voice that has challenged them to "listen to him." Jesus' response: "Rise, and do not be afraid."

Even now, in the midst of decisions that have led us to the brink of self-annihilation, consumed by a fear that propels us to open wide our hearts to the false promises of peace and safety through the threat of violence and the strength of our weapons, Jesus reaches out. He pulls us up from our knees and offers us a way forward through our fear. The way is there if we but listen to him.

~ Johnny Zokovitch