

Joy, beauty and compassion are signs of God's glory

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If I can take a phrase from the words of Gabriel: How blessed am I among women! It is truly a blessing to be with all of you today, and I thank you for coming and spending this day together, as sisters in Christ, and beloved daughters of God. I hope this first Redeemed Conference for Women has been a day of blessing for all of you as well.

Every year on the Second Sunday of Lent, we hear one of the Gospel passages of the Transfiguration of our Lord. This year we hear Matthew's account. The Mount of the Transfiguration, which we glimpse in today's Gospel, is a symbol of our goal in life: to be there, with Christ, in all his glory, forever.

Jesus took Peter, James, and John up that mountain, and they wanted to remain there, with the Lord, at the summit. Peter wanted to build a permanent dwelling up there, so they could all just stay there and bask in the glory of God. But Jesus allowed his disciples just a glimpse of heaven, just an instant of his divine glory. And then, he led them down the mountain, back into this world of crowds and struggles and problems. If they were to be authentic followers of Jesus, those apostles would have to follow Jesus as he walked through *this* world, which is certainly no heaven, as he walked to his own passion and death.

The Gospels teach us that Christians can only be true followers of Christ by following him, or at least wanting to follow him, *in this life*: by bringing a sliver of that glory to others; by trying to make this life a little better for our brothers and sisters; by searching for Jesus in the pained and lonely faces that confront us in the here and now.

Of course, we all want that mountaintop experience. We all want to remain at the top of the mountain, where there are no difficulties or ills. In fact, Paul tells us that, yes, our true homeland is in heaven. And God has promised us a future even more glorious than the promises he made to Abram in today's first reading. Like Abram – whose name was changed by God to Abraham – we too are on pilgrimage to a better land. We too must bear the burdens of the day, the heat and dust of the road. And in all our bearing, we must help others to catch a glimpse of the glory that we have seen, the glory of holiness, the glory of God's compassionate love.

You are women of all different ages and backgrounds: wives and mothers, single women and religious. Some are homemakers, some have occupations outside the home, some are retired after many full years, and some are young, just getting started. You know that these mountaintop moments of quiet serenity can be rare. The business of life goes on down here, far below the summit of that mountain, and there is always someone in need, some task that needs doing, someone clamoring for our attention. Our daily lives can be crowded and challenging.

But the Gospels show us that it's here that we find Jesus walking in front of us. It's here that we experience a foreshadowing of his heavenly glory. Didn't Jesus say that we can find him in others? And isn't finding Christ the true holiness, the true glory that we seek?

We find him in the sad faces of those who are rejected because they are supposedly inferior in birth, or background, or intelligence, or talent. We find Jesus in those who are insecure, those who are constantly in need of reassurance, in the fearful and the anxious. We find him in the sick, in the elderly who are alone and whom no one visits. We find him in those who live on the margins, those who struggle to get by from one day to the next. We find Jesus in young people who face challenges we might not completely understand. We find him in the men in our lives – our husbands, sons, fathers, and brothers. You could say that we find Jesus anywhere in the world where a Christian, where a daughter of God can bring the love and the glory of Christ.

The trick is to keep one eye fixed on the top of the mountain, and the other on the valley below, on the brothers and sisters in need all around us. One way we remain at the top of that mountain is by heeding the command of the Father, who said: "This is my beloved Son...listen to him." Whenever we enter into the presence of our Lord in prayer and meditation, listening to his voice, or just sitting at his feet, even if only for a few moments, we are there surrounded by his glory. We think of Mary of Bethany, who sat and visited with Jesus while Martha was busy. She chose the better part, she chose to just be with her Lord rather than rushing around in a dither. Our Mother Mary also teaches us to sit, to be, to listen. As Luke tells us, "She pondered these things in her heart." And countless other holy women have also listened, and pondered, and dwelled in the glory of God's holiness.

But there is glory in action too. The Virgin Mary went to Elizabeth to assist her in her need. Martha, the other "busy" sister, was able to recognize and proclaim Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, the one who could restore her brother to life. Elizabeth of Hungary tended to the sick and the poor. Two brave English women, Margaret Clitherow and Ann Line, wives and mothers, sheltered priests and other Catholics in 16th century England, and they were both martyred for their heroism. Mother Teresa of Calcutta saw the face of Christ as she cared for those who were dying on the streets. And countless other holy women have gone out of themselves, have walked in the world, and shared a bit of God's glory with those whom they served.

We've also heard today about the importance of sharing beauty and joy, so one last story comes to mind. Cardinal Dolan of New York tells a great experience he had as a priest. He was working in Washington and assisted sometimes in a hospice for patients dying of AIDS that was run by Mother Teresa's sisters. On Good Friday he led the service there for the sisters, volunteers, and patients. Then he went to the bedridden patients so they could venerate the cross. He saw one very emaciated man who was beckoning him to come over, but the sisters warned him to be careful, because he had been violent before. He even bit those who tried to care for him. But Fr. Dolan went over to him and held out the cross for him to venerate. The man grasped the cross and kissed the face of the crucified Lord. Then he lay back exhausted. The next day, on Holy Saturday, the sisters called Fr. Dolan to tell him that the same man wanted to see him again. So he went back to the hospice, and the man said he wanted to be baptized. When Fr. Dolan asked him to explain his desire, the man said "I know nothing about Christianity or the Catholic Church. I've hated religion all my life. All I do know is that I've been here for three months dying. These sisters are always happy! When I curse them, they look at me with compassion in their eyes. Even when they clean up after me, they are smiling. When they spoon-feed me, there is radiance in their eyes. All I know is that they have joy and I don't. When I ask them why they are so happy, all they answer is "Jesus." I want this Jesus. Baptize me and give me this Jesus. Give me joy." In these sisters, the

dying man saw joy, beauty, and compassion, and his heart was changed, transfigured. Joy, and beauty, and compassion are signs of God's glory right here among us. They are great avenues of conversion, and they are within each one of us by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

My dear sisters and friends, as beloved daughters of God, as sisters in Christ, you have a unique capacity to dwell in God's presence, to listen for his voice, and to be attentive to his movements of grace. But, you also have a unique capacity for love, for compassion, for beauty and joy, for attentiveness to others in need. You possess the innate feminine genius that Pope St. John Paul II recognized, a unique capacity to abide in the glory of God. May you dwell always in communion with Christ, and be transfigured by his holiness.