

I'm sure that all of us, hopefully all of us, have experienced moments in our lives of profound and sublime inspiration, moments when the transcendent becomes tangible. We are inspired to these moments at various times. Examples? Lying in a mountain meadow at night and looking up at the canvas of stars of the entire universe stretched out before us. And we've all heard of mountaintop experiences too, where we gaze out upon a vast canyon or jagged crags. For some it is the ocean which fills our field of view to the horizon and represents such an immense quantity of water, teeming with life, and extending to crushing depths.

Sometimes these moments happen when we experience great works of art. We can't comprehend how the mind of man and the skill of man are able to intersect in the creative process to produce sights and sounds that touch us so deeply. We relate to the painting – there is something human in it – and yet it draws us out of ourselves. How can sounds, merely vibrations passing through the air, move us so? Yet great works of music penetrate deeply to our core. And if you've ever stepped into one of the great medieval cathedrals, where every detail of carved stone testifies to the skill of a master craftsman, and the countless stones incredibly fit together to comprise one huge, united, and sacred space, well ... it is overwhelming.

These experiences point us to something beyond ourselves, something that we can't ever really comprehend with our minds, but yet we know in those moments that we touch something sacred, holy. We might stop and look for hours and yet still can't take it all in even though we desperately want to. We somehow want what we are experiencing to become a part of us, but when we walk away, as we inevitably must, we are left only with memories that weaken quickly. The experience we had leaves an impression, but it can't really become part of us. We want to be united with the transcendent. It is a longing for God, and yet it is external to us. It remains other.

Suppose that we live or work in such a place. For example we might be a docent at a museum or at a cathedral so that we regularly encounter the same art or space that moved us so deeply. We realize over time that we become inured to it. It becomes familiar to the point where we are no longer awed by it. We know it to be amazing with our minds, and yet it does not stir our souls like it once did. It remains other – outside of our grasp.

If only there was a way to internalize the amazement and longing. If only that ache that we have for God could be internalized. If only God could move from being outside of us to being inside of us.

Of course, as Christians, we know that there is a way for this to happen. We are gifted with the Spirit of God within us so that the transcendent God takes up residence in our very lives. In Christ, we become one with the Eternal Divinity of the Father. But for this to happen Christ physically had to remove Himself from the world. This is what Christ is saying to the disciples in our Gospel lesson today. We read there of how Jesus tells the disciples that He will return to the Father, but will then send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Helper, who will give knowledge and discernment and the gifts of Christ to the Church.

We might validly wonder why Christ had to leave. I speculate that it has to do with the same dynamics that we discussed earlier. The disciples, no doubt, experienced the transcendent in the person of Jesus Christ, but He was a physically separate being from them. I'm sure they wanted to be always present with Him to enjoy the divinity that they sensed, but there was always a barrier due to their physicality that couldn't be overcome. And it is probably as likely that being continually in the presence of Christ led to a desensitization regarding with whom they were dealing. No doubt they were continually amazed with the miracles of Christ. No doubt that their understanding of just who this person was grew ever greater and greater. You recall them exclaiming, "Who is this man that the very winds and waves and

storms of the sea obeys?" They had been with Christ for some time, but they still couldn't comprehend who He was. He continually and progressively revealed Himself to them. Yet perhaps after the hundreds of healings that Christ performed, the experience became commonplace, taken for granted even. It became more like a job, than a world-changing mission.

This is all to say that the physical presence of Christ was not necessary, and perhaps even was a barrier, to true union with God. Union with God means that God lives in you, that His life becomes your life. Being a follower of Christ means that we get to experience God now, living within us. Being a follower of Christ means that our union with God can grow over our lifetimes. And His life in us also always points us to the final union with Him in the new heaven and new earth, when the physical is not tainted by sin so that both body and soul are overflowing with the divine life as they were intended to be.

This is the good gift. This is the perfect gift that St. James describes as "from above, (that) cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Perfection does not change. It is immutable. The saints of old who experienced God were overwhelmed with the light of the divine. Take all of the cathedrals, and all of the mountaintop experiences. Submerge yourself in the vastness of the ocean and the most sublime symphony, and perhaps we start to comprehend the glory of the light of God. It is a glory that makes you cry both for joy and for your loss when the experience passes. That is the glory to which we are and will be united. That is the life of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, the Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the World, and the Good Shepherd, that is the life that lives in you. That is the life which we are called to embrace every day, the Word which we receive with meekness and gladness, which is implanted in our souls through the salvation won for us in Christ Jesus. This is the gift of the Comforter who gives to us all that pertains of Christ.

We are certainly sometimes involuntarily overwhelmed by the goodness of God. But let us not think that this gift is forced upon us. We must receive it. We must welcome it. Two important aspects here of which we must be aware. First, there is an act of the will where we conscientiously decide that we will consistently seek those things that are above. We must seek to be sensitive to the transcendent, to God. Every time we are amazed and awed by nature or by art or by our worship, you can be assured that there are other people experiencing the same things, but who cannot see them. Sublime experiences, encounters with God, draw us out of ourselves and allow us to touch the greater reality beyond ourselves. If we are focused upon our own self-centered fears or desires, we cannot encounter God. You must open your spiritual eyes in order to see the light of God. You must intentionally open your heart to God.

Second, we must not allow sin to separate us from God. If you want to experience the holy, if you want to enter into the beatific vision of God, if you want to have a union with the divine that is tangible, then you must be dedicated and diligent to strip away everything from your lives that prevents it. If you want to experience the holy, then you must strive by the life of Christ in you, to be holy.

The message to us today is that all of those incredible and sublime moments with which we are gifted in this life are not just figments of our imagination. They are gifts from God that let us know that He is real. They are signposts directing us to long for that which will truly satisfy. They are invitations to allow the presence of Christ more deeply into our lives and promises that we, the followers of Jesus holding on to Him exclusively as The Way, The Truth, and The Life, will one day experience the fullness of God. He is no longer apart. He is here now within us. He is one with us. And just as all relationships grow and develop over time, such is the case with our union with God.

Christ may no longer be present with us in body, but He is present with us in life. In these final weeks of Eastertide, may we desire God more fully. May we freshly experience the transcendent everyday. To that end, let us put away selfishness and sin, let us open our hearts to God, and let us always long for more of His resurrected life in us.

In The Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN.