

I'd like to begin my few thoughts this morning with another small reflection on prayer, that I believe is from Ed Hayes....

**To begin to pray
is more dangerous than throwing a torch
into a dry woodland.**

**In a burning forest you can run for cover,
but if you begin to pray
there is no escape
no place you can hide
from the raging fire of God.**

**At least, that's what happened to the saints
when they prayed.
All of them will testify
that their encounter with God
was like gold being tested in a furnace,
seven times refined.**

**St. Teresa of Avila warns:
"Authentic prayer
changes us-unmasks us-strips us..."**

**What she means, I think,
is that sitting in the presence of a passionate
God purges away all the dross, all the impurities
of selfishness, pride, falsehood, hypocrisy,
meanness until only pure gold remains.**

it is no wonder, then, that many kneel
just outside the furnace door—
close enough to keep warm,
far enough to keep from getting consumed—
and call it prayer.
Certainly this is a comforting and consoling
exercise, but it is not prayer.

Our reading today is commonly called the “The Transfiguration”
because while Jesus was praying,
the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white
and the apostles saw him in the company of Moses and Elijah...

But, I really think a better title for this reading is the “Transformation of you and me”
because it actually begins this way:

“Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up the mountain to pray.”

In the Jewish tradition, every time you go up the mountain it is for an encounter
with Yahweh...and often times an encounter with God was terrifying.

Were Peter, John and James excited about Jesus taking them up the mountain?

Did they really know what they were getting into?

Now, we don't know John and James reaction but we do hear from Peter...

Peter apparently wants to get close to God...but not quite that close.

He wants to get close because he accepts Jesus' invitation to go up the mountain to pray...

But instead of living out the purpose he was given for the experience,

he'd rather build dwelling places, little shrines,

to remember and worship his experience...it's a little safer, a little less costly

What I mean is this:

**For many of us, perhaps most of us, we pray for a whole variety of reasons:
we often pray to ask for things and not necessarily trivial things
but important things like health and sufficiency.**

Sometimes we pray in worship and praise...

Sometimes we pray to say thank you to God for blessings received...

That's all well and good...

But, the real intent of prayer isn't

to protect us from the fragility and uncertainty of our lives,

the real intent of prayer is to transform our awareness of who we are and who God is....

The essential result of prayer allows us, in our transformed awareness,

to live our lives as powerful conduits of the Presence of the Holy One...

and that can be very scary.

When we allow ourselves to be transformed,

we will live in ways that seem radically different from conventional wisdom,

even in ways that some will call foolish and unrealistic.

When we allow ourselves to be transformed,

'silly' ideas such as caring for Earth and

nonviolence won't seem so silly and unreal anymore,

but THE actual way God's power is revealed.

When we allow ourselves to be transformed,

justice for those caught up in unjust political systems

becomes a high priority.

When we allow ourselves to be transformed,
we recognized that what harms one harms us all....
and what benefits one, benefits us all...

When we allow ourselves to be transformed,
there is an “enoughness” to our lives...
a sense of sufficiency and contentment...

Ahh...but how we resist transformation!

Most often, we’d rather be like Peter, building churches and shrines...
Most often we’d rather worship the experience of Jesus
than participate in Jesus’ experience of God...

We’d rather stay on the mountain top singing hymns of praise
than go back down to cities and villages where the uncertainties
and vulnerabilities of life make demands upon us....

You know, most often we start on the spiritual quest,
not really knowing what we are doing or what we are asking for...

Peter, James, and John said yes to Jesus’ invitation to go up
the mountain to pray...

That invitation was extended to us as well....
and here we are: sitting in church praying...

The question for us isn’t really whether or not we shall pray,
but how far are we willing to go in our prayer
and what shall come as a result of it?

Are we only willing to go so far?

Are we only willing to build shrines and churches and dwelling places?

**or are we willing to enter, as Ed Hayes put it, the furnace room,
and let God purge away all of our dross, selfishness, hypocrisy and meanness
until only Gold appears?**

**Are we willing to walk back down the mountain with Jesus and
let God's Presence loose in the world?**

The real question for us is are we, you and I, willing to be transformed????

Amen.