

Sun, Feb 27 - The Transfiguration

Today I am going to talk to you about being changed by 'Listening to Him'.

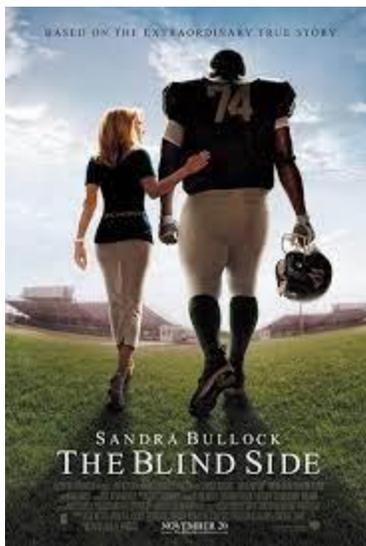
In this morning's Gospel we have a story of transformation. It's the story of Jesus' transformation. He goes up on the mountain with disciples Peter, James and John. While they are there, the appearance of Jesus' face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Moses, the bearer of the law, and Elijah, first among all the prophets, appear and talk with Jesus. This shows Jesus to be someone of equal or greater importance as Moses and Elijah.

Then a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified.

It was in a cloud that the presence of the Lord came to Moses on Mt Sinai. To those disciples, the cloud represented the presence of the Lord himself. They knew the Holy One of Israel was near and they were terrified by his presence. I think you and I would be terrified as well.

Then the voice of God came from the cloud, saying "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" They are to listen to Him and so are we.

Jesus reflected the glory of the Lord God. When we listen to Jesus, and mirror his example, we reflect Christ's light and are transformed.



Have any of you seen a movie called 'The Blind Side'? It is a 2009 'football movie', not my usual thing. But I was surprised to find it is also about transformation. It is based on the true story of Michael Oher who played in the National Football League for eight seasons, primarily with the Baltimore Ravens.

By the time Michael Oher reached the age of 17 when the movie begins, he has spent most of his childhood in foster care with different families throughout Memphis, Tennessee. His friend's father, whose couch Mike had been sleeping on, persuades the coach of Briarcrest Christian School, to help enroll his son and Mike. Impressed by Mike's size and athleticism, Coach Cotton gets him admitted despite his abysmal academic record and his low IQ score of only 80.

At his new school, Michael, being big, and black and socially inept does not fit in. Despite being ridiculed by some, he is befriended by a small boy named Sean Jr. "SJ". SJ's mother Leigh Anne Tuohy is a feisty interior designer, married to wealthy businessman Sean Tuohy who owns a number of fast food franchises. One night, 5 ft 2in Leigh Anne notices Michael 6 ft-5 in, 309 pounds, walking on the road, shivering in the cold. He refuses the lift she offers. She could have left it at that, satisfied 'she'd done the right thing'. But she was listening and she was noticing.

She realized Michael had nowhere to stay, and so she offered him a place to sleep at her house. The next morning, when she sees Michael leaving, she asks him to spend the Thanksgiving holiday with her family. One night turns into two and three and more. Slowly, Michael becomes a member of the Tuohy family, even as Leigh Anne's rich friends wonder what she is doing. One even suggests that her teenage daughter is not safe around him, much to Leigh Anne's disgust. When Leigh Anne tries to become Michael's legal guardian, she learns his mother is a drug addict and that he was separated from her when he was seven. No one knows where she is. Leigh Anne also discovers that even though he scored low in almost every category, Michael scores exceptionally high in "protective instincts".

After his grades improve, Michael is allowed to join the school football team. He has a shaky start due to his polite and gentle nature until Leigh Anne taps into his "protective instincts". She tells Michael to think of his teammates as family members. From then on, Michael dominates on the field.

Sean and Leigh Anne Tuohy adopted as a family motto,  
"To whom much is given, much is required,"

This is from Luke 12:48 in the Bible. We are accountable for the resources, knowledge, talents with which God has blessed us. If we have been given much, then He expects much more from us. The Tuohys had no idea just how much would be required, nor that they were adopting far more than words.

Michael is dramatically transformed as the Tuohy family, especially Leigh Anne, take him under their wing. But the Tuohys, each one of them, are also transformed. By going out on a limb on Michael's behalf, by risking disapproval and disbelief from those around them, by spending money, emotional energy, time and effort on Michael; they are transformed. As they allow themselves to care for and even love Michael, they reflect the light of Christ.

Just as Leigh Anne and her family were transformed by investing in Michael, we can be transformed as followers of Jesus. The voice of the Lord God on the mountain top says we should listen to Jesus, because he is the Lord's Son in whom he is well pleased. Sometimes, maybe all of the time, 'listening to him', listening to Jesus, causes us to make courageous choices.

Another example of transformation is Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine. He has a law degree but then went into entertainment, acting in the role of President until he actually was elected President in a landslide victory not even 3 years ago. He now inspires a nation to stand, to resist invasion against great odds!

On Wednesday Lent will begin with ashes. (We will have a service here at 11 a.m.) Lent can be, for each of us, a time of 'Listening to our Lord' to be transformed. Lent is an opportunity for us to slow down for even a few minutes each day. Imagine that God is going to help transform our lives with greater compassion, greater joy, deeper desires for love and service. God wants to give us something, something that will enhance our lives. Grace comes from God. God has a great desire to bless us. When we realize that, we are receptive to opportunities as Leigh Anne Tuohy was. Let us take a minute as we begin each day to ask 'What does God want to give me this year, this day?' Listen to him says the Lord.

Fix your gaze on Christ and you will be changed. God is waiting to give you a makeover... where you will shine and glow with the Spirit.

Amen.