

UNRECOGNIZABLE FRIENDS



Some years ago I was part of a small business team that met weekly. After more than a year of meeting, we became well acquainted with each other and eventually friends.

One day a team member, Marcus, showed us a photograph that he had uncovered over the weekend while he was going through untouched boxes of his mementoes. The photo was passed around the table until it stopped at Bill, who stared at it as if we were trying to make sense of it and reconcile it.

The photograph was taken a few years earlier atop of Mt. Hood in all its snow-covered glory. Five climbers, including Marcus, had accomplished a memorable, personal achievement by scaling the mountain to its summit. And here the moment was captured in a photograph that Marcus wanted to share.

Bill was stunned, silent because he was one of the five climbers. Bill and Marcus didn't know each other then – both were friends of friends who had invited them. During our many months of meetings they were unaware of their connection because during the 15 hours they spent climbing Mt. Hood together they were covered in scarves, hat, and sunglasses. Each was unrecognizable to the other.

On top of Mt. Hood, Bill and Marcus weren't strangers, just friends who had not recognized each other fully.

Today's Gospel is the familiar story of the Transfiguration. Like Bill and Marcus who thought they knew each other, the apostles Peter, James and John thought they knew Jesus until a mountain-top experience revealed to them a facet of Jesus that they had barely but incompletely comprehended: Jesus was the Son of God. Jesus was a human being and he was the Word.

In a world that delivers one type of message to us, the Gospel message is different; it is the Good News of Jesus Christ. Living a life that chooses to follow the Gospel message instead of conforming to the world's message is not easy. Still, St. Paul instructs us to bear our share of hardship for the gospel in the light of which we find the life and immortality that Jesus brought us.

As the years pass by, I move through life learning, discerning, and maturing. Each of these personal changes affects what I hear in the gospel reading. I am in a different place now than I was five years ago and much removed from where I was 20 years past. The homilist provides a perspective that had not occurred to me before. I learn a piece of history of the times in which the Gospel was written that shifts my insight. I hear the gospel differently today; I think "that's not the same message that I encountered years ago."

I have an epiphany and I realize that the Gospel message resonates with me unlike before. Like the apostles at the Transfiguration, I comprehend more fully now.

The Gospel is not a stranger, just a friend I have not fully recognized.

(Readings for Second Sunday of Lent)



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