



# Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers  
From the clergy and members  
of Holy Trinity Church  
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title: **"What are we Doing Here?"**  
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## Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Exodus 34:29-35  
Second Reading 1 Corinthians 12:27-13:13  
Gospel Luke 9:28-36

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"What are we doing here?" That's a question I'd like us to think about today. Of course, you're pretty sure what I'm here: I'm paid to be, aren't I? And if we start to ask the question as to why each of you is here, we'll have as many answers as there are people in the pews. But if we're asking the question, "What are all of us doing here: right now?" it's different. So the question is whether there is something that all of us are doing together.

The Gospel today has to do with that mysterious experience of Christ and three of his closest friends on a mountaintop. We call it the Transfiguration, which is a fancy word for a "change of appearance." In this case, the friends that were with Jesus got to see him in a different light: quite literally. The story tells us that Jesus' face and clothes were blindingly lit up and shining. The disciples probably were wondering just what they were doing there together, too. Why were they selected to see this? I love this story with its deep mystical associations, but I have often wondered how to relate this episode to what we do here on Sundays, or during the rest of the week, for that matter. Then it came to me: it's what happens every Sunday when we come to church.

Just like the disciples, we come to a remote location. (Well, it's remote from where most of us live and work, isn't it?) It's a strange kind of place, a church, designed for a very impractical and apparently unproductive purpose. But it's far enough away from our everyday lives to make it a break from our routine: coming here is a "mini-retreat" that we go on for a couple of hours once a week

And when we get here- here on our "little mountaintop," we meet God. It's quite that simple. He's here waiting for us, and offering to show us something about himself

that will be a surprise...if we let him. Now this doesn't happen to *everyone*: some people come to church expecting to be bored to tears (and those people are seldom disappointed!) Others, though, follow Jesus in their imaginations and come to this "place apart"; they open their ears and minds and hearts to what he has to say, and sometimes, if they are receptive, God shows himself, breaks through, transfigures himself. He does this in the course of the things we do here and now.

Many people, perhaps a majority, would claim that they have some kind of religion. They've been taught their Bible stories, know the basic moral rules, and believe, (or perhaps hope) that they are doing good enough to pass God's "final exam" when it comes. But they don't see the need to change their routine and the scheduling of their week in order to make time for an appointment with God on Sunday morning. They claim, more often than can possibly be true, that they can "find God on the golf course," or shopping at Megamall or diving off Batangas. Who do they think they're kidding? Certainly not God. Even if they really meant it, they don't realize an important thing: that part of God's revelation of himself is *in the people around us*: those who, like us, have chosen to be here on Sunday morning to meet God. That is why Christians hold services in their temples, rather than just having them as places for private devotions.

When Peter, James and John were up there on the mountain, they experienced something that was both personal and also shared. One of my favorite pictures of the Transfiguration is an icon showing Jesus, the figures of Moses and Elijah and the three disciples. The three followers at the bottom are there together, experiencing the sights and sounds and the feelings of the event. They are tied together by what they are experiencing, and yet each of their attitudes is quite different. One is in rapture, one looks afraid, and one is absolutely bowled over by the experience! The fact that they are there together doesn't mean that they have had exactly the same experience, but their reaction to Jesus is partly affected, nuanced and fine-tuned by the fact that they are sharing the moment together. And Jesus wanted it that way.

It's what happens here, too. No matter what each of us has on his or her mind this morning; however different our approaches, our needs and our problems, there is something that ties us together here and now because of our praising God, listening to his Word, and coming to the altar for Holy Communion together. It's something that couldn't happen on the golf course or the mall or by your pool at home. It happens here: on "out mountaintop," the church.

Some Christian mystical writers speak about the experience of being in church for a service as the whole congregation being "lifted up to heaven" for a brief time, experiencing the worship of the angels and the saints, and then being gently (or perhaps not so gently) let down again to return to the world; being told to make life here a bit more like life up there. That's a lot like what happened to the disciples after their mountaintop experience, as they have to leave the wonders of Transfiguration in order to follow Jesus down the dusty road again. But what they have learned on the mountain remains with them, indistinct and fuzzy at first, but later stronger and clearer: that by being with Jesus, they have been with God, and by being with God, they have learned how God acts. Perhaps they have even learned to act a bit more like God themselves...or at least to do things his way.

Paul writes in this letter to the Corinthians today one of the most sublime hymns about love ever penned. It is not romantic love, but the transcendent, transfiguring love that God has for us and that we need to cultivate towards others. You see, the purpose of that weird and wonderful episode on the mountain, with the prophets and the lights and all, wasn't meant to show off, but to inspire and empower the disciples to see in Jesus the pattern of their own lives: that even though times could be hard, even though life here on earth may be cut short, even though it might seem that God is far, far away, Jesus the Person is God's promise never to abandon us, never to leave us totally alone, and never ultimately to deny us hope and love, or to make it impossible to love others, either.

That is the reason we're here...all of us. That is the reason for the Christian Church's insistence that we come together once a week and do little "group exercises" like standing up, sitting down and kneeling together, or singing and saying the same things at the same time. The process doesn't make us all the same; like the disciples, we'll all come away with different impressions of how God touched us here today. But it will remind us that even in experiencing God's magnificent presence or the wonder of his spectacular universe, we are not unimportant, because we have been invited to be here and we have accepted the invitation: all of us...together.

So enjoy this weekly experience here "on the mountain," and then follow Jesus down again- to bear your own cross, to wait for your own Easter Resurrection, and to tell the world that in Jesus you have seen God, and that it was a wonderful sight.