

## "Intensely White"

Mark 9:2-9

February 19,2012

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

Have you ever wondered why we wash our clothes on a regular basis? Obviously, it's because they get dirty. First, there's the smell of clothes which have been worn, day after day, without being washed. Maybe you've experienced something like that on a camping trip or when the airlines lost your luggage and you had no change of clothes. It can get pretty gamey. Second, there's the dirt, both from the sweat on our bodies and the dirt that comes from external sources. Third, there are the stains. Have you ever noticed how often you are wearing a white shirt or blouse when spaghetti or blueberry pie is served? That's the time when the food jumps off your fork and on to your clothes. Some of those stains can be permanent. No matter how hard we wash or bleach them, they just won't come out.

So, because of the sweat, the dirt, and the stains, we wash our clothes. We want our clothes to be clean – as clean and free from stain as possible.

The clothes of Jesus are prominently displayed in our Gospel today – the story of the transfiguration of our Lord. Jesus takes the inner group of the disciples – Peter, James, and John – to the top of a high mountain where He was transfigured before them. In other words, Jesus' appearance changed dramatically to reveal Jesus for who He truly is – the glorious Son of God.

Matthew and Luke, in their accounts of this event, tell us about Jesus' face. Luke says His appearance of His face changed. Matthew says it shone like the sun. All the Gospel writers talk about Jesus' clothing. Matthew says his clothing became "as white as the light" (Matt. 17:2). Luke goes a little farther. He says Jesus' clothing "became as bright as a flash of lightning." (Luke 9:29)

But it's Mark, whom many people believe was recording the experiences of Peter, who really goes into detail on Jesus' clothes. He says that His clothes became "radiant, intensely white". In other words, they actual were shining very brightly. And, for good measure, Mark adds, "as no one on earth could bleach them." (Mark 9:3)

It used to be said that “clothes make the man”. In this case, it is true. Jesus’ intensely white shining clothes revealed Him to be holy and perfect, the Son of God. What about us? If our lives and our identities were seen as clothing, what they show about us?

I think most people would think they were dressed just fine. They look at their lives and think they are doing pretty well. They are trying their best to be good people. Maybe their clothing is not shining brightly white, but at least it’s not too dirty, either.

But that’s looking at things from our perspective. A holy and righteous God sees things much differently. He sees the people of this world clothed in the stench of sin. What we call original sin taints life even before we it is put on. It’s like putting fresh clothes on a dirty sweaty body. The clothes are dirty as soon they are put on.

Apart from God, the clothing of the people in this world gets dirtier and dirtier by their failure to acknowledge God or do the things required by Him. It is stained by the wrong that they do. Some people, as I said, are trying to do what’s good and right but, compared with the Law of God and His requirement of holiness, it doesn’t do much good. It’s like running into a person who is dressed shabbily and obviously hasn’t bathed in a while, but has put aftershave or perfume on. The scent of the perfume or aftershave does nothing to cover up the stench and filthiness. In addition to that, there are many people today who don’t care how they dress – how it looks or whether it’s offensive. We think that people out there are feeling guilty about their sin and wondering how to get to heaven. That’s not the case these days. In a recent survey done by LifeWay Research, 46% said they never wonder whether they will go to heaven. These people have been called the “apatheists”. It’s not that they are violently opposed to God. They just don’t care. They are apathetic about the existence of God.

But what about the clothing of our lives as we huddle within this sanctuary, fearful of the trends of this world? Surely, we are better because we try harder or are more spiritual or religious. But this is where we are wrong. We feel superior to people in the world, but we are not. The prophet Isaiah said something to the Old Testament people of God who felt they were better because of who they

were which still applies to us. He said, "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;" (Is. 64:6)

Notice what he says here about the clothing of our lives. He doesn't say that our sins are like filthy rags. He says our righteous acts – the best we can do – are like filthy rags in light of God's holiness. If our best efforts are like filthy rags, what does that say about our apathetic efforts at worship God, spreading His Word, and serving our neighbors? What does it say about sins of thought, word, deed – the things we do wrong and the times we fail to do good? Those are even worse.

This is where the clothing of Jesus helps us. That clothing which became white as light, became white as lightning, and shone intensely white returned to its normal color and texture. That reminds us that the glorious Son of God was also true man in the form of a servant. That clothing, a few short weeks later, would be stripped from His back and gambled for by the soldiers who crucified Him. He was given to wear the sin of the entire world, including yours and mine. He bore those sins on the cross so that we might receive His righteousness and holiness. As the Bible says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21)

The stench of your sin and rebellion against God and the filthy rags of your best efforts have been washed away in your baptism. And it's not just that the filth and stench have been removed and you've been left spiritually naked or neutral. You've been given a whole new set of clothes, better than anything you ever had. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Gal. 3:26-27) You don't have to depend on your righteousness which is filthy and deficient. Christ clothes you with His righteousness which is perfect and sufficient.

The trouble is we don't often feel righteous and holy. We usually feel like very ordinary people. Sometimes we feel like very guilty people who are not any different than our unbelieving neighbors. But remember that Jesus looked very ordinary to His disciples before going up on the mountain of

transfiguration. We who possess His righteousness as a gift won for us on the cross, guaranteed to us by the empty tomb, and given to us in the waters of Holy Baptism will look very ordinary to those around us and even to ourselves.

However, God sees each of us much differently. He does not see our sin and our guilt. Being clothed in Christ at our baptism, God sees only Christ, not us. He sees Christ's righteousness, not our sinfulness. He sees us as Christ was on the mountain of transfiguration. He does not see the darkness and dirtiness of sin. He sees us as being "as white as the light", "bright as a flash of lightning", and "radiant, intensely white."

So, take heart when you consider your sinfulness and when sinful acts weigh you down with guilt and despair. See yourself, not as you feel, but as God sees you. Have hope for one day you will see yourself as God sees you. St. John writes in his first letter, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2)

We are already on our way to our own eternal transfiguration experience. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians that they "are being transformed ("transfigured" – the same word used in our text today) into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Cor. 3:18) As Jesus has been transfigured permanently to a body of glory, so shall we be permanently transfigured in the life that is to come in our permanent home. As St. Paul said to the Philippians, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." (Philippians 3:20-21)

There's nothing that feels better, especially after working hard and sweating, than a refreshing shower and a clean set of clothes. In your sinful nature and in your sinful actions, you have been washed and refreshed in Holy Baptism. You have been clothed in Christ and His righteousness. It may not be apparent to you and those around you, but God sees that cleansing and that righteousness and that's all that matters. Like Jesus' transfiguration where the disciples got a

glimpse of His glory, you get a glimpse of Christ's righteousness in baptism, in absolution, and in the supper. And there will come a day when there will be no more glimpses but only glory. To that, we look forward with eagerness and great anticipation. Amen.