Second Sunday of Lent: Cycle C
The Transfiguration: Awakening to Glory

St. Theresa Benedicta (St. Edith Stein), “The mystery of the Incarnation and the mystery of evil are closely connected. Against the light which has come down from heaven the night of sin appears all the more somber and sinister.” We often are not aware of how dark evil is, until we see the light of Christ. When the light of Christ begins to shine, we come to recognize the darkness of the world around us. Once we stand in the light, we realize the true depth of darkness.

Recognizing the darkness is not a path to despair. Far from it. The light of Christ is greater than all darkness, and stands ready to empower us as disciples. Perhaps using other terms, we can say, we need to be aware of how “disfigured humanity has become,” so we can participate in the “transfigured human condition.”

The Transfiguration reveals a perfection of love so powerful that it radiates from the inner life of Jesus Christ and bursts outward to all in light beyond description. From the heights of the mountaintop, Jesus envisions his immersion into the world’s darkness. And he reveals from the depths of his being, a humanity consumed with divine glory; the glory of a dark world transfigured into the light of divine peace.

The path to divine glory is humanity, the humanity of the Risen Lord. As the Church Fathers taught, “The glory of God is humanity fully alive.” Glory pours through his flesh, his humanity, the same humanity as ours. In our baptism, our humanity is united intimately to the Risen Lord’s glorified humanity. Divine glory not only flows into us with baptism, but like the Lord, is meant to flow out of us to others.

Roused from sleep, Peter, James and John witness the Transfiguration. They are awakened to glory. We need to be awakened to glory. Awakening to glory, we are also awakened to the dark forces disfiguring human dignity. Awakening to glory becomes an awakening of our own responsibility as disciples to repent of the darkness within each of us, and to pour out glory in loving service. Then the world around us can be awakened to glory.

Here are only a few examples of such disfiguration of the human condition. On the abortion issue, the picture is decidedly mixed. Over the past several years, the numbers of abortions and abortion rates in Maine and throughout the country have dropped considerably. There may be several reasons contributing to this decline. Certainly some of credit must go to those who have been diligent with educational materials, such as the Knights of Columbus.

Also, the varied support services provided for young women with troubled pregnancies. So many residential facilities where women can bring their babies to birth and decide if they are going to raise the child or place the child in adoption. Anti-abortion organizations in the pro-life movement are not simply about legislation and prohibiting abortion by law. They are fully committed to education and assisting women and the children in their wombs with compassion and care.

Vice President Mike Pence speaking before the 2017 March for Life in Washington DC, “But as it is written, ‘let your gentleness be evident to all.’ Let this movement be known for love, not anger – for compassion, not confrontation. When it comes to matters of the heart, there’s nothing stronger than gentleness. I believe we will continue to win the hearts and the minds of the rising generation if our hearts first break for young mothers and their unborn children and we do all we can to meet them where they are,
with generosity, not judgment. To heal our land and restore a culture of life we must continue to be a movement that embraces all and cares for all out of respect for the dignity and worth of every person.”

However, in too many countries, abortion becomes a way of eliminating those with physical and intellectual disabilities. This is especially true of the numbers of infants with down syndrome aborted in many countries, especially Iceland, Denmark, and the United States. Let me be clear. There are no laws in any of these countries requiring abortion for down-syndrome babies or any other disabilities. But there are few cultural supports encouraging bringing these babies to birth.

There are also distorted expectations of “human perfection” leading to abortion. The Transfiguration teaches us where human perfection ultimately exists. The mystery of human perfection is not found in athletic abilities, intellectual brilliance, sexual performance or prized possessions and accomplishments. The mystery of human perfection is found in “love” and in “love” alone!

There are also attempts in our own state to provide public funding for abortions. Legislation before the Maine State legislature would cover abortions under MaineCare. The Roman Catholic Church strongly teaches that health care is a human right and not a luxury for those that can afford it. The Catholic Church has consistently advocated for increased coverage of basic health care needs under MaineCare, Obamacare, and other legislation. But abortion is not health care, and our tax dollars should not be appropriated for abortions.

The care of our global environment is an issue of a more immediate importance. Large number of scientists in growing consensus are more and more alarmed at the impact humanity has on the increasing global warming. This growing consensus warns, if these issues are not addressed comprehensively and in a short term, no other issue will matter.

Already, the effects of global warming are devastating in many areas of the planet and almost always affect poor people disproportionately. Good stewardship of the environment is an ancient Christian teaching dating back to our roots in Judaism. But papal teaching on this issue has developed considerably in the last fifty years. Both Pope St. Paul VI and St. John Paul II spoke out for a greater moral commitment to environmental care.

But Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have both (if you excuse the expression) turned up the heat for an immediate need to make drastic choices to save the planet and all who inhabit it. Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si* is a landmark teaching. But for some reason, these papal teachings on this subject have gained little traction in our country. We need strong religious and political leadership on this issue.

Thirdly, and briefly, the Catholic bishops of the United States have issued a strong letter on the continuing legacy of racism in our country. Their pastoral letter against racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love*, said “The injustice and harm racism causes, are an attack on human life. The Church in the United States has spoken out consistently and forcefully against abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia and the death penalty and other forms of violence that threaten human life.

“It is not a secret that these attacks on human life have severely affected people of color, who are disproportionately affected by poverty, targeted for abortion, have less access to healthcare, have the greatest numbers on death row, and are more likely to feel pressure to end their lives when facing a serious illness. As bishops, we unequivocally state that racism is a life issue.”

We need to awaken the world to the glory of God. A world awakened can better recognize the great darkness of evil with the light of Christ. The world needs to be awakened to human dignity that begins with conception and ends with natural death. The world needs to be awakened to human responsibility for the
ecological life of our planet and our call for deep conversion regarding responses required to try and stave off an irreversible ecological catastrophe. The world needs awakening to the great injustices and violence of racist attitudes.

As Catholics and Americans, we are called to awaken our nation to the value and dignity of human life; and the responsibility we all have to protect and serve all life. From a Roman Catholic perspective, being labeled “pro-life” only begins with the abortion issue, but does not end there. To truly be “pro-life” requires assent and good work on a wide range of moral issues impacting the dignity of the human person. This homily presents only three of those issues, but three of the most important ones.

The light of Christ, pouring through his glorified humanity, makes clear the dark forces distorting and disfiguring the human community. This same light gives us the path and the ability to move humanity toward a transfigured renewal.