

Monsignor Dennis Sheehan
Homily Given on February 28, 2010
2nd Sunday of Lent – Liturgical Year C

David Tracy is probably not familiar to many folks. Yet, in academic circles, David Tracy has been praised as the finest theological mind of our age. A few years ago, Professor Tracy lectured for a few months at Harvard. A friend of mine's aunt went faithfully to every lecture. She sat there transfixed. "You mean", I asked her nephew, "that she understood what Tracy was saying?" (He's brilliant but obscure.) "Oh, my aunt said herself, she never understood a word. But she loved listening to him because she knew whatever he was getting at, it was very, very important."

Well, I hope many of you feel that way today. My job as a preacher is to help you see God more clearly. But today we're face to face with Transfiguration. In the face of light, glory, clouds, and voices, those three disciples are utterly befuddled. Do you think I can explain it? Forget it. Just realize it's very, very important.

What happens when you say in the face of experience: "What was that?" Those disciples on the mountain surely asked that. You – and they – are admitting you are ignorant and confused. But right there – at the confession of mystery – is an opening for growth.

Nowhere in the Gospels is Jesus obsessed with clear explanations. He talks most of the time in riddles and parables. The kingdom of God is like yeast, or seed, or wayward children. Maybe we get a little insight. But we never really get our arms around what Jesus is saying. We never really "get it". I'll suggest here that we're not supposed to "get" the Gospels. "Getting it" in our world means having control. Jesus is supposed to "get" us – not the other way around.

What if this scene of transfiguration is another kind of riddle"? It shows us something of Jesus. But more, it tells us faith is a road into mystery beyond anyone's capacity to figure it out.

What if this transfiguration is like a great work of art? No one stands before a great painting or statue and cries, "I get it!" Rather we say, walking away, "Wow – that really got me."

Rules and principles, doctrines and explanations all have a place and time. Today is not one of those. Today, we are in a realm of beauty, mystery, and rapture. We call it Transfiguration.

We can't "figure Jesus out". He's God in human flesh. He befuddles us all the time. He welcomes sinners. He turns our values upside down. He astounds us with all this talk of mercy and forgiveness. Certainly, dying on a cross is not a clear sign of much. We "just don't get him", but he gets to us.

Thanks be to God for that, and a blessed Lent to all.