

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Feast of the Transfiguration; 60th Anniversary of Msgr. John Auer

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St. John the Evangelist Church

August 6, 2017

Some sixty years ago, a newly ordained priest, Fr. John Auer, arrived at his first assignment, St. Jane Frances in Pasadena. Evidently there was no fanfare, no banners, no welcoming committee, no formal introduction to the parishioners . . . No, he just showed up and found the pastor, Fr. Raymond Kelly, in the backyard, sitting with his little white dog. After a brief greeting, the pastor said to him, "Go into the Church and hear confessions," ...something Msgr. Auer has been doing every week for nearly six decades.

Thus did Msgr. Auer begin his long and extraordinarily fruitful priesthood: hearing confessions on a Saturday afternoon in a suburban parish. This humble beginning might seem pretty far removed from the mystery of the Transfiguration just proclaimed in the Gospel – but in fact, I would say and I think you would say that Msgr. Auer has spent his whole life proclaiming the glory of Jesus, helping us to listen to him, and helping us to shine inwardly with the goodness and glory of God revealed on Jesus' transfigured face. It's not my intent this morning to canonize Msgr. Auer but I would like to illustrate how, in his priestly ministry, he has brought us close to Jesus and shared the life of Jesus with us.

In any priest's life and ministry, the living Word of God takes first place. Before the priest can proclaim and preach the Word of God, he must first obey the Father's voice, heard on the mountain of the Transfiguration: "This is my beloved Son – listen to him." In his life of prayer, Msgr. Auer daily listens to the voice of Jesus which speaks on every page of Scripture. Effectiveness and joy in the priestly ministry, in fact, hinges on spending time with the Lord, reading the Scriptures, praying the

Breviary, and simply being quiet so as to listen to the voice of the Lord. Coming before the Lord in prayer is a little like climbing the mount of the Transfiguration. It always involves our coming into the presence of the Lord; it always involves opening our mind and heart to the glory of Jesus, true God and true man; Sometimes, during private prayer, I find myself repeating the words of Peter: "Lord, it is good to be here." Thank you, Monsignor, for being a prayerful priest who listens to the voice of the Lord.

And thank you also for proclaiming the Word of the Lord far and wide. Convinced of the truth and power of God's Word, Msgr. Auer became not only a disciple, a follower of Christ, and not only a priest who serves the Church ably - but also a missionary. Five years after ordination, he joined the St. James Society, learned Spanish, and went to Ecuador to minister in a place that had over 10,000 Catholics but very little contact with the Mass and Sacraments because of a shortage of priests. Msgr. Auer brought the light and love of Jesus to that community as he learned not only their language but also their culture and, in the process, established a credit union that is still functioning. In helping those he served, he opened their minds and hearts to the Lord.

In the 2nd Letter of Peter we are told to be attentive to God's Word, not only because it is utterly true and reliable but indeed because it is like "a lamp shining in a dark place". Msgr. Auer has brought the light of God's truth and love in some very dark places, as he has ministered to the sick, the poor, and those troubled in mind and heart. Among those to whom he ministered were those involved in drug abuse. And on one occasion, this ministry put him in harm's way.

Dear friends, in the mystery of the Transfiguration, the humanity of Jesus shone with the glory of God. In that moment, it was revealed that Jesus' humanity was the *original* sacrament of his divinity. In fact, the sacraments of the Church are patterned on the Transfiguration. The outward signs of the sacraments are simple and ordinary elements that are part of our human experience . . .but they show us and put us into living contact with divine love: the mercy and goodness of the Father who sent us his Son; the sacrificial love of the Son who takes away our sins and restores our life; the sanctifying power of the Spirit who enables us to be like Jesus.

Well, beginning with the first of countless confessions in 1957, Msgr. Auer has been a minister of the Sacraments for sixty years . . . baptizing infants and adults, bringing them the new life of Christ and making them members of the Church, the Body of Christ; celebrating the Eucharist, in which we share in the death and resurrection of Christ as we are nourished with the Lord's Body and Blood; forgiving sins in the Sacrament of reconciliation; preparing couples for marriage; anointing those who are seriously ill and giving Viaticum to the dying.

All this Msgr. Auer has done in parishes such as Holy Trinity in Glen Burnie, St. Bridget's in Canton; and, of course, Our Lady of the Fields in Millersville. And he continues to share the Lord's sacramental presence here at St. John's. Only the Lord knows, Msgr. Auer, how many people whose hearts and souls you have touched with the healing and sanctifying presence of the Lord Jesus! And you have done this with graciousness and love. How we give thanks for the goodness of your ministry.

Now, as you recall, it was Peter, James, and John who witnessed the Transfiguration - but, as usual, it was Peter who spoke up - suggesting to the transfigured Lord that he build three tents one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for the Lord. That suggestion didn't fly, but since the early days of the Church we have indeed been building houses of worship where Christian communities could gather to celebrate the presence of the Lord in their midst.

During Msgr. Auer's 13 years as Pastor of Our Lady of the Fields, the parish grew rapidly and became necessary to renovate the Church and to expand the parish facilities. This was a sign of growth and vitality and a sign that Monsignor worked effectively with his parishioners to build up his parish as truly a community gathered around the Risen Lord, as truly a community of faith, worship, and service.

And so, Msgr. Auer, we say that it is good for us to be here - with you -and to celebrate and give thanks with you and for you -on this 60th anniversary of your priesthood. We thank you for answering the Lord's call even as we are convinced that young people today are called to God's service in the priesthood and consecrated life. And we ask that the Lord bless you with great peace and joy, health and happiness, as you continue to minister in our midst - *ad multos annos!*

God bless you and keep you always in his love!