



His Excellency, Kevin C. Rhoades, Bishop of Fort Wayne – South Bend, Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord – Mass with Blessing of the Oratory of the Holy Family, Rome City, Indiana (August 6, 2022)

It is a joy to celebrate Mass with you on this Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord and to bless this Oratory of the Holy Family. We had hoped to have the Dedication of a new altar at this Mass, that will have to be postponed because of the accident yesterday. Still, we gather with joy for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist on this beautiful feast. It was important that I bless this Oratory. This had once been a sacred place, the Mother of Mercy Chapel of the Sisters of the Precious Blood, who for 75 years prayed and worshipped here, along with the sick who came here to Kneipp Springs for water treatments as well as the local faithful and summer visitors before Saint Gaspar Parish was founded and its church dedicated in 1957. This was once a sacred place where the Sisters, who owned and operated the Kneipp Sanitorium, would adore the Blessed Sacrament, the first priority of their religious congregation since its founding in Switzerland in 1834. It is good that we remember today the many sisters who served and prayed here (including Sister Mary Ephrem) during those 75 years, from 1901 to 1976, many of whom are buried in the nearby cemetery. You may have noticed that I have said that this was a sacred place. I used the past tense because this oratory lost its sacred character after it and the sanatorium were sold by the

sisters and eventually fell into the hands of a unitarian sect with heretical beliefs. They denied the divinity of both Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Thankfully, they did not tear down this oratory. Now today we can again call this oratory a sacred place since I have blessed it, or I should say – God has blessed it. It has been blessed with the holy water, a sign of the cleansing waters of salvation in which we have been washed in Christ and made temples of the Holy Spirit. From this day forward, this oratory is again a place for divine worship. It now has a new title – the title of the Holy Family. Here, I pray, many families will come to be strengthened in faith and love, inspired by the Holy Family to imitate the virtues of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph and aided by their intercession.

This Oratory of the Holy Family is the most important part of this Center named in honor of Our Lady, the Immaculate Virgin, Patroness of America because here Jesus, her divine Son, who assumed our humanity in her pure womb by the power of the Holy Spirit, will dwell in the tabernacle. His Sacrifice for our redemption will become present here at every celebration of the Eucharist. And His Body and Blood will be given in Holy Communion, nourishing the souls of all who receive this sacrament of His love. Pope Saint John Paul II called Mary the “Woman of the Eucharist.” No Marian Center would be complete without the Holy Eucharist. Mary always guides us to this most holy sacrament. She offered her own flesh and blood to Jesus and became the living tabernacle of the Lord. She opened herself completely to the presence of Christ. She teaches us to open ourselves to Jesus’ presence, to receive His Body and Blood with faith, and to live what we receive. Mary allowed herself to be penetrated by God’s love and she lived the self-giving Eucharistic love of her Son. She helps us to do the same.

I think it is providential that this oratory is blessed on the Feast of Our Lord's Transfiguration. It seems to me that it is more than a coincidence that this chapel is blessed today since the Transfiguration reveals Christ's divinity, the great truth denied by the unitarian sect that came to own and occupy this site several years ago.

The Transfiguration was certainly an amazing and unforgettable experience for Peter, James, and John. Saint Peter mentioned it in his second letter, as we heard in today's second reading. He recalls hearing the voice from heaven while they were with Jesus on the holy mountain, the voice of God the Father testifying that Jesus is His beloved Son.

In the Gospel, Saint Luke tells us that it was while praying on the mountain that Jesus' face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white. How did Jesus' face change in appearance? Luke doesn't say, but Saint Matthew does in His Gospel. He wrote that Jesus' "face shone like the sun." In other words, His face became radiant. Pope Benedict XVI pointed out that "the Transfiguration is a prayer event; it displays visibly what happens when Jesus talks with His Father: the profound interpenetration of His being with God, which then becomes pure light. In His oneness with the Father, Jesus is Himself (as we profess in the Creed) 'light from light'." (Now paraphrasing a bit), what Jesus is "in the deepest core of His being" became perceptible to Peter, James, and John – "Jesus' being in the light of God, His own being-light as Son of God." Pope Benedict noted the similarity of this event on Mount Tabor to an event from the Old Testament on another mountain, Mount Sinai. Recall that when Moses was coming down the mountain, the Book of Exodus tells us that the skin of His face shone because he had been talking to God. Moses' face was radiant and he didn't

even know it. Though this is similar to the Transfiguration, there's something different, Pope Benedict says. "The light that causes Moses to shine comes upon him from the outside, so to speak. Jesus, however, shines from within; He does not simply receive light, but He Himself is light from light."

Besides Jesus' face becoming radiant with light at the Transfiguration, his clothing became dazzling white. Often in Scripture clothing is a visible expression of the person; white clothing signifies holiness. Recall our first reading today: Daniel had a vision of the Ancient One on His throne. He says that "His clothing was bright as snow, and the hair on his head as white as wool." In Saint Mark's account of the Transfiguration, he says that Jesus' clothes were so intensely white that no one on earth could bleach them. Pope Benedict wrote that these white garments also speak of our own future. "In apocalyptic literature, white garments are an expression of heavenly beings – the garments of angels and the elect. In this vein... the book of Revelation speaks of the white garments that are worn by those who have been saved. But it also tells us something new: the garments of the elect are white because they have washed them in the blood of the Lamb; this means that through Baptism they have been united with Jesus' Passion, and His Passion is the purification that restores to us the original garment lost through our sin. Through Baptism we are clothed with Jesus in light and we ourselves become light." Did you ever notice that Mary is often depicted wearing white? No human person has reflected the light of Christ as much as she who was without sin. We call Mary in Latin "tota pulchra," which means "all-beautiful." Why? Because "in her the radiance of God's glory shines forth" (*Sacramentum caritatis* 96).

At the Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared in glory and spoke with Jesus. What did they talk about? Saint Luke tells us that they “spoke of His exodus that He was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.” In other words, they were talking about Jesus’ Passover, His passion and crucifixion, by which He would pass over into glory in His Resurrection. Why would Moses and Elijah talk to Jesus about this? Because the Law and the Prophets, whom they represent, spoke of this future Passover. Remember when Jesus spoke with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after His Resurrection, He explained to them how the Scriptures, the law and the prophets, pointed forward to Him and His passion, death, and resurrection.

Peter wanted this experience of the Transfiguration to last so he wanted to build three tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. But that was not to be. While he was saying this, a cloud came over them. The holy cloud, in Hebrew “the shekinah” is the sign of the presence of God Himself. Remember the cloud which came upon the Tent of Meeting during the Exodus. Here at the Transfiguration, Jesus Himself is the Meeting Tent. God the Father’s voice came from the cloud, saying: “This is my beloved Son.” These are the same words of the Father that were heard from the cloud at Jesus’ Baptism. But here, God the Father says something more. He says: “Listen to Him.” “This is my beloved Son; listen to Him.” Jesus Himself is the divine word of revelation. He is the eternal Word of God, the Logos, the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us. These words mark the end of the Transfiguration. Peter, James, and John must now accompany Jesus back down the mountain and learn ever anew to listen to Him. These privileged three will be with Jesus in Gethsemane, in His agony in the garden. Jesus gave them a glimpse of His divine glory before they would witness

His passion and death. Jesus wanted the light of His glory to illuminate their hearts through the thick darkness of His passion and death, when the folly of the cross becomes unbearable to them. God is light, and Jesus wishes to give His closest friends the experience of this light which dwells within Him” (Pope Benedict, Angelus, March 4, 2012). He wants to protect them from any assault of darkness. The same with us. We all need that inner light of God and His love in order to overcome the trials of life and the assaults of darkness. I pray that people who come here to this center and chapel will receive and grow in this light, especially those who are hurting or suffering in any way. “This light comes from God and it is Christ who gives it to us...”. And Mary helps us to receive this light. We already know that this has happened through the years here at this center and here in this chapel which today has again become sacred. Of course, this will only happen if we obey the words of the Father at the Transfiguration: “This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.” This is a place where I hope many people will come to pray, which is fundamentally, listening to Jesus. In Hebrew idiom, to listen to someone’s voice means not only to hear, but also to obey. So this means that we listen in our minds and hearts to what Jesus teaches us in the Gospels and that we strive to put them into practice. Mary teaches us basically the same thing the Father commands us in her words to the waiters at the wedding feast of Cana: “Do whatever He tells you.”

Here in this Holy Family Oratory and in this Immaculate Virgin, Patroness of America Center, I hope that many will “climb with Jesus the mountain of prayer and, contemplating His face full of love and truth, allow themselves to be filled with His light” (Pope Benedict). Our Blessed Mother, who was filled with the light of her Son, lives now in the light of His glory in heaven. She waits for us and she

prays for us. The Church invokes her as “Maris Stella,” the “Star of the Sea” because on the voyage of our life, she is a star who shines with the light of Christ to guide us along our way. She is a star of hope for us. May she shine upon all who visit and pray in this sacred oratory!