

Homily (18th Sunday of Ordinary Time) – 8/6/2017

Do you recall the name Paul Harvey? If you do, you probably heard him on radio. He was on over 775 radio stations as a commentator. And he would always end his show with a five minute segment called “the Rest of the Story”. The Rest of the Story was Paul Harvey’s way of spotlighting an unknown fact about a famous figure. His range of stories covered everything from the comical way Coca-Cola was formulated, to the unique path Humphrey Bogart traveled to become an actor.

Now, often the stories start out with sadness and suffering. Yet they end up concluding in triumph. Here are two samples of Paul Harvey’s stories: One day Alfred began reading the morning newspaper. He was shocked to discover that he was dead. At least that is what the newspaper said in the obituary column. The paper said Alfred had died and the world had lost a great scientific mind. Yes it was true that he was a chemist, engineer, inventor and businessman. Except that Alfred was not dead. In fact as he read his obituary he did not like how he was remembered.

You see in his work he had put together the lethal ingredients that went into the making of dynamite. And he was also a major manufacturer of armaments for war. The obituary condemned Alfred for profiting from the sale of weapons and manufacturing of arms. In fact the obituary said Alfred became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before. Alfred did not wish to be remembered that way. So he started a foundation and instituted a prize with a lucrative reward. This reward was to be given to anyone in the world furthering peace in the human family.

Today this prize is known as the Nobel peace prize. It has been given to world figures such as Mother Teresa. And it all began with Alfred, Alfred Nobel reading his obituary. And that is the rest of the story. Then there was the story of a boy named Guiseppe. He lived in a large Italian family in San Francisco. His father came to America from Italy carrying the family tradition of being a fisherman. Now Guiseppe being one of nine children was expected to help the father on the boat as a fisherman. However, the rocking of the boat always caused young Guiseppe to get seasick. Along with that his sensitive stomach could not stand the smell of fish. This enraged the father and he would always call the boy “good for

nothing". Often the boy hid underneath the bed when the father went looking for "good for nothing" Guiseppe.

Young Guiseppe tried odd jobs to help support the family. He was an errand boy, then a newspaper boy, and later as he grew up and drifted from one job to another, he began to believe his father that he was "good for nothing." But then Guiseppe found something that he loved with a passion. And he became very successful at it. In fact if little Guiseppe had been able to join his father in fishing, today there would be a vast vacant space in baseball's hall of fame. And the world might never have watched one of the greatest baseball players of all time: Guiseppe, Joe DiMaggio. And that is the rest of the story.

Okay but what does this have to do with the gospel? Well the Transfiguration passage you just heard was the rest of the story. How?

In the gospel just before the Transfiguration, Jesus has told his disciples about his upcoming scandalous suffering and crucifixion on a cross. An experience that would traumatize his followers.

For like you and me these followers of Jesus wondered how an all loving God could permit suffering. Like you and me they first saw suffering as the contradiction of an all loving God, as incompatible with their image of God. Yet, Jesus showed that suffering plus faith equals redemption; suffering plus faith leads to the purification of faith, suffering plus faith leads to the purification of love. Still, we can guess the thoughts and feelings that must have filled the heart of Jesus. He didn't like suffering any more than you or me. So, with his three apostles he climbed a lone high mountain far from people and their busy noise. Jesus was at the point where his ministry was a failure. And the pain of ingratitude had taken their toll. The thought of his coming passion and the suffering that accompanied it must have created storms in his soul.

Yet, on that mountain Jesus was transfigured before his disciples. His face shone like the sun, his clothes became white as light, the light of God shone brightly through him. The Transfiguration of Jesus previewed the Resurrection of Christ. So it is not by coincidence that today's feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus, comes forty days before September 14th which is the annual feast of the exultation of Christ cross. In fact this same exact gospel passage was proclaimed on March

12th of this past year on the second Sunday of Lent, 40 days before Easter. The Transfiguration gives a preview of the rest of the story. But not just for Jesus. For example you have probably heard of near death experiences. Near death experience is when a person is just about brain dead, yet is resuscitated. Twenty percent of such people return telling of being drawn to an intense loving white light. Eighty five percent of all children return telling being drawn to an image of Jesus.

Hard to believe? Yes for me too. But the University of Virginia medical school now has a department devoted to studying near death experiences. In fact, listen to these words that come from the catholic funeral mass. These words will be said at your funeral mass during the Eucharistic prayer. They ought to make the hairs on the back of your neck standup.

The priest at your funeral mass, referring to your life after death with God says: "On that day every tear will be wiped away, we shall see you as you are. We shall become like you". You see the white light that Jesus experiences at the Transfiguration, the one that previews his resurrection, clothes becoming white as light, also points to our resurrection. We shall become like God. And, that is the rest of your story.