"Am I led by the Spirit of God or by the spirit of Man?"

A good day to you and to each of my esteemed listeners! Welcome to EWTN's Open Line Tuesday edition! I'm Barbara McGuigan, alive and grateful and still pondering the amazing grace of the Transfiguration, the grace that shows us that we, too, can bear our hardships for the Gospel because we have been given "the strength that comes from God." No trial is too great for us to endure on our "royal road of the cross." God's airwaves are open and here are the numbers to call:

In North America call 1-800-585-9396
Outside North America call 1-205-271-2985
Our email address is always Openline@ewtn.com.

I've always seen the Transfiguration as a great source of consolation. Not one of us is going to escape serious trials. If we want to follow Christ, how could we expect life to be a quick and easy run down a waterslide? That's not going to happen. Today, I'd like to share parts of a very important sermon by the great Fr. Patrick McHugh on the Gospel of St. Matthew, chapter 17: 1-9, on the Transfiguration.

Fr. McHugh celebrated his 60th Anniversary of his ordination in May, 2010. He now has health challenges, so please keep him in your prayers. He's kindly given me permission to quote from his remarkable sermons. Father began this particular sermon by saying how Jesus was "transfigured before their eyes" and by quoting St. Peter's words to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here." Fr. McHugh writes:

> The spiritual journey often begins in a burst of exaltation and joy. We feel that God is near and that He loves us in a special way; we are certain that from now on the thrill of closeness will be ours forever; we are certain we have left behind the stark necessity of believing because we are so near to vision. There will be no more returns to those weaknesses in ourselves we have become accustomed to, like so many spiritual scabs and scars and warts that disfigure us: our bad tempers and our moods, up one day and down the next; our struggle to remain even moderately attentive at prayer; our terrifying lack of confidence that God knows what He is about, our... but why continue the list? We have left all that behind us forever. We are on the heights and we cry out with Peter, "How good that we are here."
>
> But the moment does not last. Very soon we are back in the grimy earth again, our faces pressed down into the mud of our miserable failures to be even moderately faithful. Sometimes the mood of high exaltation is swept away in a storm of terror and fear; our world has been smashed by some anxiety or set-back or failure or pain; the glory we glimpsed for a moment has been wiped out. We look around and we see 'only Jesus.' It is hard to see 'only Jesus.' It is harder still when He tells us not to fear. It is hardest of all when He goes on to speak of His Passion

and Death. 'Do not tell anyone of the vision until the Son of Man rises from the dead!'

We feel we want to cry out: What kind of talk is this, Lord? We want a spiritual life with You that is all love and life and light and exaltation and union and joy, but You come to us to talk rudely of fear and death?

There is a shattering irony in the spiritual life: until we have known by experience the thrust of this complaint, we have not really known Him. We do not begin to know God in light but in darkness. The Rhineland Dominican, John Tauler, who lived in the fourteenth century put the insight of mystics this way:

> Our Lord spoke of this solitude when he bade the prophet Joel speak thus: 'I will lead my own into the wilderness and I will speak to their hearts.' This wilderness was his silent lonesome Godhead to which he wants to lead all those who are to be taught to respond to his whisper, now and in all eternity. Take your vain and lonely ground, which is filled with weeds and devoid of all goodness, and where the wild beasts of your animal senses and forces reign supreme, into God's solitary, still and free ground.
>
> Then you will contemplate the divine darkness, which by its blinding clearness appears dark to human and even to the angels' understanding, just as the resplendent orb of the sun appears dark to the weak eye; for it is in the nature of all created understanding that, compared with the divine clarity, it is as small as a swallow's eye when compared with the size of the sun and as far as this understanding is merely of the natural order it must be beaten back into unconsciousness so that it can do no more harm.

Brothers and sisters, Fr. McHugh now counsels:

The saints tell us that if we want to come to know God we must be prepared to enter into what seems 'darkness' where God is 'absent.' In this 'night' we are cleansed and purified of the subtle egoism that makes us choose God for our satisfaction and not for His glory. We want God... but on our terms. We can never become radiant with His grace until this self-seeking is completely burned away.

Pray that you will never have a fantasy of what you think the spiritual life should be. It is no more possible to invent our own spirituality than it is to decide on how to perform brain surgery or pilot an airliner. Many people do not want to hear this. They will say you are lacking in 'the Spirit' or in 'compassion'; they will urge you to become 'up-dated.' For them spirituality is an 'experience' and to have an 'experience' it is not necessary to learn any teachings, only techniques: go to a gathering, respond fully to the vibrations of the group, take part in prescribed rituals, the proper modes of using hands and voice, and then you will certainly 'experience' the Holy Spirit. It is very difficult to convince them that there is any

> spiritual teaching that their 'experience' must be measured by. But this is the truth.
>
> We cannot invent our own Christianity and expect to be transformed by the Holy Spirit. We may, indeed, tell everyone that we have 'found' God or that we have been 'born again,' or even that we are 'saved,' but, outside and apart from, what the Church teaches, either formally in so many words or by approving the lives and writings of great saints, there is too much room for illusion in what we aspire to. We all want to dance around our own Golden Calves. There is no end to the ways in which demons manipulate us to get us to make up a pleasing and delightful 'religion' of our own. It cannot be done; this is why reading the great mystics of the Church can be so salutary. They can be devastating when they speak of the absolute necessity of the Cross for all. They are God's great friends and if we must speak of 'experience,' it is theirs that is the touchstone of what is authentic and sound. Be careful of people who seem to use 'experience' as the ultimate test. The Truth outside and beyond our feelings and experience must always be measured against Truth given us in the Word of God and in the teaching of the Church. All God's great friends are forged on this anvil. And so must you and I.

Brothers and sisters, Fr. McHugh goes on to write:

> There is nothing perverse or wicked about longing for ecstasy, or, at least, the feeling of closeness and intimacy and love. We would not be human if we did not have a longing to escape from the dark and difficult world of Faith and come to a Community of Love caught up in union with the Lord which is what heaven will be. It might be asked, why should it be wrong to long to experience a preview of heaven now? Lord, how good it is for us to be here.
>
> The spiritual life is a long journey to God. In every journey there are stages: a starting point, a destination we look to. In between, there may be dangers, adventures, surprises, set-backs, helps, sorrows, joys. This is the way it is in the journey to God: there are stages we must pass through...
>
> When God intervenes in the life of any soul in such a way that we can say that from that point on the person begins to live a 'spiritual life' He usually come in torrents of feelings. Prayer is easy. Practices and observances are consoling. The adventure of the journey to God seems thrilling. The first stage of the journey to God are heavily sensate, suffused with sentiment and highly emotional...
>
> The object of spiritual formation is to form convictions. The masters of the spiritual life teach novices they must meet the Lord in the Gospels so as to be filled and immersed in His outlook. Spiritual formation insists on prolonged and continual meditations on the basics of Faith. We have to burn into our souls such lines and passages as:

> What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul? Or this: If you will enter into life, keep the commandments. Or this: If anyone wishes to be my disciple, let him take up his cross daily and follow me.
>
> The first purpose of formation is to set direction, to turn our face to God, to look in a new way. When Peter tried to tell Our Lord that His suffering and death should never happen...' far be it from you, Lord' Jesus turned on him with unaccustomed ferocity to say, 'You do not speak the things of God but of Man.'

Brothers and sisters, Fr. McHugh now explains:

> There are two spiritualities in the world and our Blessed Lord distinguished between them. The first He referred to as a spirituality of the things of Man. In modern terms, a humanitarian Christianity, an outlook that sounds and looks so splendid and humane...but which He excoriated. He insisted that His followers must always look to the second spirituality, what He called the spirituality of the things of God. The dividing line between the two is in what He told Peter: 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem.'
>
> Spirituality that is authentic will tell you about the Cross. Spirituality that is a fad, that is only ideology, will not. It is the Cross that makes the difference. We must know the struggle to be faithful. We must know opposition and crisis and pain in the Cross. There is no Easter in our lives until there is first a 'going up to Jerusalem'. It is His Passion and Death that makes the difference. We must know turbulence and anxiety and fear.
>
> If you struggle to be faithful to God in the duties of your state in life, if you try to be obedient to His Will, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit will begin to glow within your soul: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, fortitude, piety and fear of the Lord. 'To be led by the Spirit' is the climax and the purpose of the journey to God. A profound instinct for truth cannot be taught because it has no necessary relation to intelligence or learning of any kind. In every other branch of knowledge intensive study, excellent presentation and expertise are all necessary to becoming an expert. Theological learning is like a lot of machinery that is useless until it is connected with a source of power. You will never come to an understanding of God unless and until the light of the Holy Spirit irradiates your mind from within, and He will not do this unless you cry out for the strength to do and accept His Will. Only then will you begin to see. And not until then, no matter how famous you may be.
>
> In the crisis of Faith that tore the Church asunder in the 16th century... Act I of that terrible drama of which we are now going through in Act II...one of the few people in England who had a clear vision of what was really at stake was not a theologian but a layman, Thomas More. Why did he have clear vision when others were blind? He was Saint Thomas More. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit were radiant within him and, as a consequence, he had an instinct for the truth that

> others did not have. This is the way it is always. Theologians who never pray never come to know or understand God even when they spend their lives talking about Him.
>
> The spiritual life is a long journey to God. He calls us to him in moments of excitement and enthusiasm and joy, but very soon He takes us up into the turbulence. If we struggle to remain faithful, He forces us to cling to the instruments of Faith so that we shall at last come under the control of the Holy Spirit and be led on fully and completely by Him.

My brothers and sisters, I think you will agree that in this sermon of his, Fr. McHugh has given you and me truly vital spiritual counsel. It seems to me that you and I should be asking ourselves the question, "Am I led by the Spirit or by my preferences or unredeemed desires?" The late and great Fr. Thomas Dubay had something to say about that. He wrote:

> People love to protect their lifestyle, and show an amazing resistance and see the truth as a threat to what they want to do, which is actually a threat to their unredeemedness, and they are not being led by the Holy Spirit. Yes, we are fully redeemed by Christ, but am I embracing my redemption and applying it in my life? And so we all must ask the question, 'Am I led by the Spirit of God or the spirit of man?"

Let us pray that, with God's ever-present graces, we will be transformed into the Divine Lover and thereby in possession of Divine Light. I look forward to your comments and questions. It is a grace to be with you today! Here are the numbers to call: 1-800-585-9396 and 1-205-271-2985.

Closing: A thousand thanks for your insightful calls and emails. A thousand thanks also to my brilliant producers, Tom Graye, Elena Rodriguez and Mike Romano.

Fr. Peter John Cameron, editor of the *Magnificat* always hits the nail on the head! He writes:

> Admitting sin is one of the hardest things in the world to do. We are not so reluctant to confess the small sins or the sins that matter very little to us, but we struggle to present honestly to God the sins most deeply woven into the fabric of our lives and, in confessing them, to let them go. During Lent, we call on the power of Christ's cross to free us from these bonds that hold us.

Until next week on Open Line, Blessed be God and may He mightily bless you! Bye for now!