

Woman: Let us pray the prayer for illumination. Open our hearts and minds, O God, by the power of your Holy Spirit. So that as the word is read and proclaimed, we may hear your message with joy this day. Amen. The gospel lesson is from the gospel according to Saint Matthew, the 17th chapter. "Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James "and his brother John, and led them up a high mountain "by themselves, and he was transfigured before them, "and his face shone like the sun. "And his clothes became dazzling white. "Suddenly, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah "talking with him. "Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord it is good "for us to be here. "If you wish, I will make three dwellings here, "one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' "While he was still speaking, "suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them. "And from the cloud a voice said, "'This is my son, the beloved, "with whom I am well pleased. "Listen to him.' "When the disciples heard this, "they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. "But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "'Get up. "Do not be afraid.' "And when they looked up, they saw no one "except Jesus himself alone. "As they were coming down the mountain, "Jesus ordered them, 'Tell no one about the vision "until after the son of man has been raised from the dead.'" This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Man: There he was changed before them. His face shone like the sun and his clothes became as bright as the light. Several years ago, pop icon Michael Jackson topped the charts with yet another record breaking hit, called The Man In The Mirror. In this song, Jackson says I'm starting with the man in the mirror. I'm asking him to change his ways. If you want to change, you gotta take the time. You gotta make the change. Change, change, change. Michael Jackson's song speaks of a change as a revolution from within. As something that starts first with a heart, and then manifests itself in other realms of one's life. This is quite similar to Mohandas Ghandi's belief that we must become the change we want to see. In other words, any true change of structures, of systems, or even of others, begins with a change of the self. It's also noted that almost everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself. It's so much easier it seems, to change those around us. To change others. We can do this without anyone else knowing whether we ourselves are actually changed or not. It's really a form of deception. Urging and suggesting others to become what we really are not. What would you think of a preacher who tirelessly invited others to accept Christ, only to discover that the preacher had not done the same? Change is perhaps the most obvious theme in today's gospel lesson. Jesus, high on a mountain, experiences a transfiguration. A transformation. A change. This change is witnessed by Jesus' innermost circle of disciples, Peter, James and John. See, an actual change in Jesus' physical appearance, followed by a pronouncement that affirms what is not necessarily another change, but more of a newfound awareness of who and what Jesus really is. These three disciples see an outward change, and they hear from God about an inward change that occurred to Jesus, even before his birth. Jesus was transfigured before these three disciples of his. In the Greek the word transfigured literally means a metamorphosis or a transformation. This is not only an outward change of appearance, but it's an internal change. A change deep within. Jesus becomes the passive object of an outward metamorphosis that reveals his inner nature. Jesus does not change himself. This change is done to him. The passive voice of the Greek verb transform in is Matthew's way of telling us that God transformed Jesus before the very eyes of Peter. Before the very eyes of James. And before the very eyes of John. Paul,

on at least two occasions, uses the same word to convey to his audience his understanding of a change. His understanding of a transformation. In his letter to the Romans Paul writes, "Do not be conformed to this world, "but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, "that you may prove what is the will of God, "what is good and acceptable and perfect." In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul also writes, "All of us with unveiled faces see the glory "of the Lord as though reflected through a mirror, "are being transformed into the same image, "from one degree of glory to another." Change. That thing that so many of us fight so hard against. We may fight against it. We may not want to do it. But we are by virtue of Christ's transfiguration, called to do it. We're called to be changed. We're called to be transformed. We too, are called to be transfigured. An inward change ought to be reflected in each of us. My grandmother would express her understanding of this change by saying the things I used to do I don't do anymore. She went on to say I have a new walk. I have a new talk. Obviously, she did not have a physical change in her walk, neither did she begin to speak a different language. But she did begin to walk down another path of life. A path where love overcomes hate. A path where vengeance gives way to forgiveness. This past week, I had an opportunity to hear a gentleman by the name of Jean Robert Cadet. He gave a presentation about his life. Mr. Cadet was orphaned as a small child and was eventually sold off as a child slave in Haiti. A particular family he was owned by treated him quite poorly. He had only a small piece of cloth that he used to cover his entire body with. His day started just before the sun would rise, and he would work well into the night without any breaks and with very little food to eat. After several years his family moved to the United States where they settled in upstate New York. They brought Jean Robert along with them. In New York they continued to keep and treat him just as they had done while back in Haiti. Years passed and eventually the family kicked this young man out at the age of 16 because of his desire to attend school. There he was. Only 16 years old in a strange land with very little experience at anything in life, other than being a servant. And as if that was not bad enough, he spoke little or no English. Through a series of what he calls blessings in disguise, doors were opened left and right. And this former child slave, became an officer in the United States military. Graduated from college. And eventually became a college professor. Some years later, Mr. Cadet returned to the home of his Haitian owner in upstate New York. As he presented himself at her door, she greeted him by saying my son, you've returned to care for me. How ironic. This very woman had beat this man as a child. Had denied him the basics of a decent life. And now she stretches out her arms, expecting him to embrace her. It took some time, but Mr. Cadet eventually forgave this woman for all she had done to him. I wonder how many of us would have responded to her with forgiveness. I wonder whether I could have responded to her with forgiveness. Maybe I would. Maybe I could, if I were transfigured, transformed, changed. Mr. Cadet had been transfigured, on the inside and the out. He was no longer a teenage boy. He was now a grown man. But more importantly than that, he had overcome the natural human instinct to repay evil for evil. He had become a changed man. The transfiguration of Jesus upon the mountain lets us know that we are to be transfigured. We are to take on the likeness of Christ. We're not to get swayed to the ways of this world. We're not to conform to the world. We are to be in the world, but not of the world. Those who conform and sell out the gospel, not only never change themselves, but will never be able to change anything about this world. In the Bible equally important to change itself, is where that change takes place. And most dramatic changes in scripture just happen to occur on or near a mountain. To the ancient Hebrew mind, there's something mystical about mountaintops. Such places were associated with God's dwelling. Most of the people who experienced a theophany or an encounter with God, did so on top of a mountain. God appeared to Abraham, Moses and Elijah on mountains. We've come to understand Moriah, Horeb and Sinai as places

where God is not only revealed, but also as places where special instructions and special insights are given for those who desire a change in life. Those who desire a change in the world. In his final speech, Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of his mountaintop experience. He spoke of how he'd caught a glimpse of the promised land. King spoke with the full awareness that before he could reach this land of glory, he must endure great suffering. He knew what his destiny entailed. In a sense, he predicted his own death. He predicted the fact that the expense of doing right was indeed high. King took the model of Jesus, who after being transfigured on the mountain, who after being changed on the mountain, who after being transformed on the mountain, descended immediately to the suffering masses and crowds in the valley below. Wherever, or whenever the transfiguration takes place in your life. Wherever or whenever you are transformed. Wherever or whenever you're changed. There needs to be an awareness of the fact that life does not stop there. Notice how Peter in today's gospel lesson, notice how Peter once again as the spokesperson for the disciples, notice how he wanted to prolong this experience. Peter says Lord, it is good for us to be here. Let us build three tents. One for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Some of us would like to do just what Peter suggested. I'm sure many of us would find it difficult to tear ourselves away from such an awesome scene. After all, here we are, in the presence of Moses, a representative of the law. Elijah, the great prophet of prophets. And the Lord himself. Surrounded by such glory, Peter's remarks seem to be logical and in order. Mark's gospel, however, reveals to us that Peter knew not what he said. Once we are transfigured, once we are transformed, once we are changed, we're not to dwell in that experience. There's a mission or job, for each of us to do. This mission involves us taking on the role of suffering servant. It involves us doing exactly what Jesus did. Jesus came down from the mountain, after his change, and he entered the valley below. He came down into the world where sin and death were so prevalent. There's a story of a little boy out in his backyard throwing a ball up in the air. An elderly passerby asked the boy what he was doing. The boy replied, I'm playing a game of catch with God. I throw the ball up in the air, and he throws it back. Whatever goes up must come down. The same process applies to our religious lives. It is a good thing to go up to a great experience with God. But we will become greatly disillusioned if we do not remember that eventually, we have to come down again. It is a good thing to change. But it's an even greater thing to allow that change to manifest itself in other arenas of our lives. At the height of the civil rights movement, some of the behind the scenes organizers came up with a brilliant idea of how to change some of the laws that made segregation and discrimination legal. Clergy who were involved with organizing the freedom rides throughout the south thought that in order to change segregation rules in places like restaurants, hotels and even schools, they should start first with the church. The idea was that if the Freedom Riders could simply gain entry into white churches and have their messages heard, then those transformed, those changed, those transfigured white people would carry that message to places like restaurants, hotels, schools and government facilities. For some this happened. But for so many others, that change never manifested itself. The Freedom Riders thought in order to change the laws, perhaps we should start with the change of the hearts, for those who support and helped to enforce such unjust laws. As followers of Christ, as those who have been transfigured, as those who have been transformed, as those who have been changed inside and out, there are certain things we must do. Our transfiguration, our transformation, our change should surface itself in all that we do and say. As a child, I found it very difficult to understand why my mother would spend countless hours of her time preparing meals for elderly people in our community. I found it hard to understand why she would go and visit people in the hospital we barely knew. I found it particularly hard to understand why she felt the need to drag me along with her while she

did these things. But as I think back over the years and reflect upon those things, I vividly recall an old call and response song that I heard around my house many times. The writer who remains unknown, spoke of how he or she had been changed. And how this change now causes them to live a different life. The words go on to say that if you don't believe I've been redeemed, then follow me down to the Jordan stream. My mother would often sing this song as her testimony. This song, those meals, those visits to the hospital. These were her ways of expressing that she was a transfigured, transformed and changed woman. How do you let the world know that you're transfigured? How do you let the world know that you're transformed? How do you let the world know that you're changed? Can those around you see a difference in your life? The transfiguration of Jesus Christ implies that our lives will be changed. We will become more Christ-like. And as transfigured people, as transformed people, as changed people, the world ought to know it. The world ought to see something different about us. We ought to be busy doing the world of Jesus Christ. The Methodist theologian Georgia Harkness penned a short poem about this episode of scripture. She wrote, "Transfigured on a mount, the master stood. "His raiment white and dazzling to the sight. "In radiance divine it would be good "to stay and dwell forever in that light. "So Peter thought. "But Jesus spake him nay. "He knew that in the valley below a sick boy lay." In a few moments, we will share a meal together. This meal is a reminder that we are a people who have been called. We are a people who've been changed. We are a people who are being changed. Eat this meal. And may it renew your body. May it renew your mind. May it renew your soul. So that you're able to reflect a change, inside and out. Amen.