

# ***Second Sunday of Transfiguration – What Similarities Do We Have?***

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St. Leon Armenian Orthodox Church, Fair Lawn, NJ  
July 10, 2016  
Gospel Reading: Matthew 18:10-14*

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My daughter Srbouhi is five years old and last year she was in preschool. Before starting preschool, she was nervous because she did not know anyone there and was nervous that she might not make friends. My wife and I encouraged her, saying she needs to be herself. The first day of school came and went and when she came home, we asked how it went. She said it was great and that she made five friends. We asked how that happened and she said she looked for those that were similar to her: those that were girls, who had long hair and were interested in the movie *Frozen*. She found kids that had similar interests.

This is true for all of us because we are social beings. It is natural for us to search for those who are like us, whether it be language, looks, interests, beliefs, ideas or even mindsets. We look for those who are similar to us and then we start to form groups and join together, but when we do this, we also separate from other and alienate those who are not like us.

Finding similarities are how nations are established, political groups are formed and movements begin, movements like the ones we've heard about this past week, such as Black Lives Matter and the Blue (Police) Lives Matter. These movements may have good principles and may have begun for good reasons, but unfortunately, they have caused more division than unity. Many have claimed that God belongs to these groups, but in reality, God does not belong to the Black Lives Matter movement, nor does He belong to the Blue Lives Matter movement. Rather, He belongs to the All Live Matter movement and we see this in today's Gospel reading because to Christ, all lives are precious.

Today's Gospel reading (Matthew 18:12-14) recounts the parable of the lost sheep. Christ talks about a shepherd who has one hundred sheep and one wanders off. He leaves the ninety-nine to find the lost one and when he finds it, he rejoices, not because the ninety-nine remained safe, but because he found the one. Christ does not say if it was a sheep that wandered off was black or white, old or young, righteous or sinful – because that sheep was

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precious to Him. For Christ, all lives are precious and He demonstrated this by sacrificing Himself for each of us.

Then how should we act in the aftermath of the tragedies in Minnesota, Louisiana and Dallas? As Christians, we must look for what unites all of us. In this parish, it is Holy Communion, because all that received Holy Communion today are united with Christ's Body and Blood. In the general church, it is our baptisms and even Holy Myron (Chrism). But what unites us outside the church? Outside there is no Holy Communion or Holy Chrism. The answer is found within each of us – the image of Christ.

We are all created in the image and likeness of Christ (Gen. 1:26) but we do not see it. The Greek word for image is icon, so we must image a physical icon of Christ in each of us. Yet, when we sin; when we lie, cheat, steal and gossip, it is like take mud and sludge from the ground and throwing it at the icon of Christ. The more we do this, the more that image of Christ is distorted, until it is unrecognizable. As Christians, we must look past the dirt and filth and see Christ in each person we meet.

This also means we must wipe away the dirt and grim on our icons in us, so others see Christ in us. We do this through prayer, fasting, good works, Holy Communion, being part of a Church community and participating in confession. This is why the deacons and priest walk around the church and cense the faithful with incense. It is not just to make smoke or spread a sweet smell. The priest and deacon cense the people because they are censuring the icon of Christ that resides in each person.

So we must strive to see the image of Christ in each person, the very similarity we all share and we must also show that same image in us. We must allow Christ to be seen and not our sins and mistakes. Instead of seeing a beggar asking for money, we must see Christ. Instead of seeing a single mom who needs assistance, we must see Christ. Instead of seeing a stranger asking for help, we must see Christ. When we do this, it is then that Christ's words will become a reality, when He says, *"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me...and they will say, 'Lord when did we do these things to you' and He will answer, 'Truly I tell you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers [and sisters], you did it to me'"* (Matthew 25:35-41).

Amen.