

Last week I spent several days visiting my aunt who is a Maryknoll missionary sister. As she has gotten older and her health has declined, she has moved back to the sisters' motherhouse in New York. She lives on the assisted-living floor but a couple of the days my aunt, my brothers and I gathered for mass up on the nursing floor of the convent. Twenty or thirty minutes before mass the nurses would start to bring in the sisters, one by one, in their wheelchairs or walkers, 30 or 40 of them well into their 80's or beyond.

As we prayed and I looked around the room I was aware of a few of their individual stories and imagined many others. These women had given many, many decades of service to the poorest of the poor in countries like Korea, Namibia, Uganda, Venezuela, China, El Salvador, Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines and many others. Some were doctors, others nurses, others teachers or social workers. They gave all they had, some even risked their lives for the sake of the gospel and caring for God's little ones. There they sat, long-returned from their foreign work, waiting for mass. Some were able to enter fully into the mass, others sat with eyes closed and head back, but fully aware of what was happening as their mouths moved to the Lord's Prayer. Still others seemed oblivious to what was happening but when one of the sisters came around with the Body of Christ, they heard the words and opened their mouths to receive once again the transformed presence of the One *they* served with absolute commitment. These holy and dedicated women, now transfigured themselves by years and tears, by compassion and self-giving, by faith and life itself, receiving with joy and trust Communion of the One transfigured on that holy mountain for Peter, James and John – and for all disciples who would come after them.

***“This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.”* It struck me as I imagined the work of those Maryknoll sisters that they had done exactly that. And just as Jesus' body was transformed to show his real and pure being, these women also were transformed by their work and lives, to show the real, pure beings they were created to be. Their hands now trembled, their eyes dimmed, their hearing failed, their gaze sometimes fixed but the work of their lives preceded them and seemed to speak so loudly for them in their now quieter states of being, as though to say, “Yes, we listened.”**

When that voice came from the clouds and Peter, James and John fell to the ground in fear, Jesus came to them, gently touching them, saying, *“Rise and do not be afraid.”* No doubt some of those women as young sisters heading off

to foreign lands also felt afraid. We can look at life ahead of us and become afraid too. An aging body or an aging spouse or parent, a sick child, divided families, looking for work, doing our best in school, living in a broken world - and striving to live the gospel call of faith through it all. That is, in the name of Jesus Christ, recognizing that we are adopted children of God – beloved daughters and sons – and living as though all of humanity is our family. That is the prophetic call. Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on that holy mountain – the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). The Law gives us the structure and the direction. The Prophets give us the message and the work to be carried out and, as Peter put it, the prophetic message is “*like a lamp shining in a dark place.*” “*Rise and do not be afraid.*”

I was impressed by those Maryknoll sisters because they have walked by the lamp of the Gospel. And I am often impressed by you when you do the same – caring, giving, and living faith. Our lives speak what we believe. May we all be transfigured by what we believe, thereby transforming the world.