

Thoughts after The House of Bishops
By Fr. Christopher Keough, OFP
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I recently had the privilege of attending the United States House of Bishops in Malverne, New York. The Bishops of the Charismatic Episcopal Church in the United States meet at least twice each year to pray, hear from God, hear from each other, and through the power of the Holy Spirit by way of consensus government, to lead the CEC in the US. This is the third time I have sat with the Bishops of the church, twice at the US House of Bishops and once with Patriarch's Council of world wide Bishops. Each time, I had the same profound experience of the church. Each meeting was, as Thomas Merton might have described, a "mountaintop moment."

A Transfiguration Moment

"And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, and James, and John his brother, and doth bring them up to a high mount by themselves, and he was transfigured before them, and his face shone as the sun, and his garments did become white as the light, and lo, appear to them did Moses and Elijah, talking together with him. And Peter answering said to Jesus, 'Sir, it is good to us to be here; if thou wilt, we may make here three booths - for thee one, and for Moses one, and one for Elijah.' While he is yet speaking, lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and lo, a voice out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My Son, -- the Beloved, in whom I did delight; hear him.' And the disciples having heard, did fall upon their face, and were exceedingly afraid, and Jesus having come near, touched them, and said, 'Rise, be not afraid,' and having lifted up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus only. Matthew 17:1-8

In the scene of the Transfiguration of Christ, Peter is mesmerized as he enjoys the presence of Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. So much so, that he doesn't want to leave that place. Can you blame him? How wonderful it must have been to be sitting in the presence of God himself and his prophets, and to hear them speak and to drink in their words. One cannot fault Peter for wanting to make that moment last forever. Imagine the most wonderful time or experience in your life, and perhaps you have felt the same way – wishing it didn't have to end so soon. Not only does Peter not want it to end, for a moment he loses his perspective and wishes that he could preserve it just for himself and make it last forever. His Transfiguration moment was to witness the very presence of God, and to be blessed with a glimpse of God's glory yet to come. The House of Bishops for me has been a Transfiguration moment, a mountain top experience that offered me tremendous hope, encouragement, and a glimpse of God's glory in the presence of our Bishops. The CEC is lead by a group of Godly men who seek first and foremost to serve God, to know Him and to make Him known, and to live in communion with their brother Bishops and clergy, and the all the people of the CEC. As I sat there listening to these men speak about their love for God, having witnessed healings, conversions, and many miracles of God, and openly professing their belief in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and complete acceptance of scripture as His Holy Word, I could not help but to think how wonderful it would be if I could do this all the time! Let's build booths, and we can all stay here and talk about Godly and spiritual things, and bask in the love of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit! Build the booths!

A Mountain Base Moment

It was a fun moment with God to have compared my experience with the biblical account of the Transfiguration. I had to chuckle silently at myself as I imagined literally building booths in the fellowship hall at The Church of the Intercessor in Malverne. In actuality, the House of Bishops was certainly not as pretty as the scene on the mountaintop. It is probably better described as a ‘mountain base’ experience. While Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were glowing in raiment white at the top of the mountain, the House of Bishops was a more down to earth, nuts and bolts, practical experience. The Bishops were clearly seeking the Holy Spirit so that they could minister to God’s people at the base of the mountain. None of the Bishops were glowing in raiment white. None of them were surrounded by a heavenly cloud as they spoke. Indeed there were even more intense moments of debate as disagreements were voiced over some of the issues discussed. But throughout all the meetings, the thing that was most evident was a sincere, genuine desire to serve the church as faithful servants, seeking God’s will and the anointing of the Holy Spirit as each agenda item was brought forth. There was no sense whatsoever that anyone has a personal agenda or ulterior motive driving them. The Bishops sought true consensus, leading, and guiding of the Holy Spirit for their House, for their jurisdictions, and for the whole CEC. Throughout the meeting there were times of laughter, times of frustration, times of misunderstanding, and even times of confusion. There were times of joy, some sad moments, and often cause for rejoicing and singing. Whatever the case or topic, every man who spoke was respected, and the voice of each man was heard. At the end of each day, we left that place in friendship as brothers in Christ who were perhaps a little closer than we were at the start of the day.

The Long Journey Home

I found myself wishing that my wife could have been with me to experience it. Sadly, she wasn’t able to attend. I was in attendance representing the US Commission for Church Planting and Development, but anyone is welcome to attend the House of Bishops and listen. With the exception of sensitive and pastoral issues that require executive sessions, the Bishops are committed to transparency in the governance of the church. Each Bishop made it clear that they were committed to the CEC, and the vision for our church cast by the Patriarch. With that in mind, I knew that I must somehow convey to my wife – and then to my readers – just how blessed we are in the CEC to be lead by godly men of prayer. They are a diverse group from many different places with different histories and stories. Each carries his own wounds and scars from past events in their personal lives, ministry, and in the rocky history of the CEC itself. Yet each, to a man, is solidly committed to the Charismatic Episcopal Church and determined to help it succeed. This determination comes not from a desire for self-preservation, but rather from a clear leading by the Holy Spirit that we have something special and unique to offer to a world that so desperately needs its Savior.

From that place each returned to their home diocese and parish with a sense of renewed strength and commitment to the mission and vision of this church - to reach the least, lonely and lost, and to bring the gift of the ancient church, convergence worship and consensus Holy Spirit government back to the world. We also left with a clear sense that we have a lot of work to do, and that we are a very fragile communion at this point. We must strengthen and build the congregations we have in the CEC. From diocese, parishes and cathedrals with strong foundations we will plant new churches and ministries. It is a process. It is taking up His cross and following in sacrificial ways. It is a journey that Jesus promises to walk with us. It is hearing the call to “come and follow” and stepping out in faith with the support and help of our brothers and sisters in Christ who have embraced the vision of the CEC. The vision is a mountaintop, Transfiguration vision. It is a vision that will draw all of us closer to the presence of God. Casting and working the vision is perhaps the mountain base, foundation work. It’s the roll up the sleeves, “down and dirty” part of being the church. God will bless us as we embrace this vision and answer His call. The Bishops of the CEC are listening – to God, to each other, and to you - and the voices will continue to be heard.