

"Coraggio!"

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Courage!, the Italians say to a friend who is looking troubled or down-in-the-mouth. We could say it that way, but we generally don't. Our usual phrase would be, "You can do it!" There's a difference, though. The strong, the able-bodied, the fit can do it. Those with courage may have none of these qualities, although the confidence and ability would certainly help. In fact, we often distinguish between the courage of the prudent and the imprudence of the foolhardy.

This week on Thursday is the Feast of the Transfiguration. The feast is celebrated at this time, rather than in the Spring just before the time of year Jesus went to Jerusalem, initially because an early church built on Mt. Tabor (the mount of the Transfiguration) was dedicated on the sixth of August, but in the western Church the feast's timing was solidified by news of victory at the Battle of Belgrade in 1456. Battle and courage go together, after all.

If foolhardiness means that we imprudently face a challenge without proper resources to see the battle through, then courage would mean the same thing as "you can do it!" But if that were the case, then we would only need look at the heroes and supermen of our movies in terms of their strength. The calculus would be simple: the strong survive, the weak perish. However, we see in our stories the weaknesses of those who are heroes and heroines. They display courage when, despite their weakness, they fight the good fight. In real life, that is, not in the movies, people

display courage though they have multiple weaknesses, and we see courage even when they don't overcome.

Strength is only one resource available to those with courage. In the movies, the bad guys have henchmen, but the good guys have friends. This is a bit like the difference between a true shepherd and a hired man when the wolf comes. At the Transfiguration, Jesus showed Peter, James, and John the face of our great Resource. God the Father, in one of two times his voice is heard, proclaims the power present saying, "This is my beloved Son," and then gives the *sine qua non*, that without which courage becomes foolhardiness in the face of the passion to come: "Listen to Him!"

The Lord knew that without him Peter, James, John, and we ourselves most certainly couldn't face the Cross or even our crosses. We can't do it, but we have courage because He can. Moreover, on the mountain Jesus gives them a glimpse of those who are alive in God, and refers them to the resurrection. The final foolhardiness would be to give our lives for an unworthy cause. A cause is not worthy because it is surely won or because it is popular. The cross appeared as loss, until the resurrection's vindication. A cause that is worthy will lead to life.

Standing on Tabor, basking in the shining face and the resounding voice, we might wish to just stay above the fray. And yet we have been told to listen to Him. Courage!