

How many people do you know, and how well do you think you really know them? Reading the Scriptures and pondering what they might mean to us these days led me to wonder about that. I found that researchers at Columbia University have estimated that the average American knows somewhere around 611 people. It could be as low as 290 or so; a lot depends on your estimation strategy.

Take a moment and check your own inventory – who’s there? Don’t forget to count yourself. Then go ahead and add in your family, friends, acquaintances, co-workers, perhaps an enemy or two and, if you’re really unlucky, the police, the FBI and the IRS.

Other research suggests that we know only 10 to 25 of those 611 people well enough to trust them.^{1,2} Somewhere among our list of trusted people are our closest friends and family members – people who we trust would do anything for us, anytime. It is to these people alone that we feel comfortable revealing our deepest selves and the desires of our heart.

It may be that part of the reason Jesus chose only Peter, James and John to experience the vision of his deepest self was that he knew they were going to be the ones entrusted with the mission to carry the Good News of God’s merciful, compassionate love to the world after his death and resurrection.

In the end, these three disciples proved themselves to be indeed capable of bearing that trust, eventually becoming willing to do anything, anytime for Jesus, up to and including surrendering their lives. Peter led the Church in its formative years, and was martyred for his efforts. James did likewise, also giving his life. John, Scripture tells us was the disciple Jesus especially loved.

¹ <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.485.9778&rep=rep1&type=pdf>, July 15, 2017

² https://www.princeton.edu/~mjs3/mccormick_salganik_zheng10.pdf, July 15, 2017

Like Peter, James and John, you and I have just now personally witnessed the Transfiguration, by way of the Scriptures. That means that we, too, have been entrusted with exactly the same mission as Peter, James and John, for exactly the same reason. Apparently, Jesus Christ considers you and me to be among those closest to his heart, those he can surely trust. The questions that beg to be asked are: Can we say we're willing to do anything for God, anytime? Do we share our deepest selves and the desires of our heart with God? Is God first among those closest to our heart?

There's a deeper motivation for God's desire to number us among those closest to his heart than just being best friends. Paragraph 460 of our Catechism tell us what it is: "The Word became flesh to make us "partakers of the divine nature" ... "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God." That's your destiny and mine. The Transfiguration shows us the astonishing truth of what your deepest you and my deepest me actually looks like. Every so often we get a glimpse of who we really are, for there's a transfiguration event of some kind in everyone's life. If you haven't experienced one just yet, stay tuned.

My friend Ernie told me one day what his was like. He and his wife, Frances, have been married for about thirty-seven years now. One day, when we were walking along the river over in Collinsville he told me the story. "Frances and I were working together in the garden," he said. "The sun was low in the sky and she was over on the other side. I looked up and suddenly saw her lit from behind by the sun, outlined in luminous brilliance. It was like a vision – the light illuminated her like the glow of God's presence and she seemed one with the light. I'd never seen her like that. You know how St. Paul says we live and move and have our being in Christ? There it was, in real life, flashing for just and instant right in front of my eyes.

I must've made an unusual noise, because the next thing she said was 'Ernie, are you OK?'. I told her I thought I'd just seen her innermost being. She looked at me dubiously, raised her

eyebrows, and told me not to tell anyone about it until after her resurrection. I touched her arm and said ‘No, I suddenly saw you just now in a way I never have before. It’s as if I’d just seen for the very first time the deepest reality of the person I really love.’”

“That got her attention. We went inside and I told her more. I can’t explain where any of it came from, except to say that everything that bubbled up from me was full of excitement, amazement, love and gratitude. We ended up in each others’ arms, laughing with joy. Later on she told me ‘I knew that you knew me and loved me, but you’ve never spoken to me like that. No one has. Maybe you really did see my deepest me out there in the garden’.”

Then Ernie turned to me and said: “I’m not telling you I had a vision or experienced some kind of miracle, but in that moment I got to see something I needed to see. You don’t think I’m nuts, do you?” “Not at all,” I replied. “St. Catherine of Genoa used to tell everyone she met, ‘my deepest me is God.’ You actually might have been privileged to have seen in Frances something even more profound than what you thought you saw out there. The person you really love might just be God, alive and active with, within and all around Frances.”

I tell you that story because yes, the Transfiguration is fundamentally about Jesus, his origin and mission. It was intended to give Peter, James and John strength to deal with the pain of Jesus’ Passion, open their minds to understand his Resurrection, and make them committed to remembering it all in their Eucharistic celebrations, just as we’re doing right now.

It also shows you and me something we need to see if we’re to claim that we really know ourselves, or anyone else for that matter. Turning the gem of the transfiguration of Jesus around in the light of God’s love clearly shows that when Jesus revealed his deepest self to his closest disciples, he also revealed to us the deepest truth about you and me, our life right now and our ultimate destiny. Now he trusts us, equally his closest disciples, to do whatever it takes to carry that message of intense love and unimaginable intimacy to the world.