

Sermon on the Last Sunday after the Epiphany and the Diocesan Ancestor Memorial Sunday

Rev. Antony F. W. Liang, St. Timothy's Church, February 15, 2026

Today is the last Sunday after Epiphany, which we usually call Transfiguration Sunday. But for us in the Taiwan Episcopal Church, today has a double meaning because it's also our diocesan Veneration of Ancestors Sunday. When we talk about "venerating ancestors," I know some of you—especially if you're new to the faith or the only Christian in your family—might feel a bit of a knot in your stomach. In our society, "ancestor worship" is a huge part of family tradition. We know that in Confucian thought, family comes first—especially the idea of honoring your elders. But we also know that traditional ancestor rituals are often mixed with superstition. People worry about their ancestors not having enough money in the afterlife, they're afraid of "ghosts" coming back to settle debts, or they treat ancestors like gods to be bargained with for wealth and safety. This kind of "ancestor worship" culture leaves many Christians feeling stuck: *"If I don't hold the incense, am I being disrespectful? If I don't burn paper money, am I forgetting my roots?"*

Actually, the Taiwan Episcopal Church has taken this seriously since the very beginning. We don't want you to throw away your traditions; we want to help you find the *true* meaning of filial piety through your faith. We can't avoid this topic because it's central to how we witness to our families. Back on July 20, 1992, Trinity Hall—now known as Trinity School for Christian Ministry—held a special seminar on "Ancestor Rituals." They invited all sorts of opinions with a very clear goal: "Preserve the true meaning of culture, establish appropriate liturgy, and clear up the confusion for believers." During that seminar, everyone reached a big consensus. Even though we say in the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed that we believe in the "communion of saints," and the church has always prayed for the departed, we hadn't really been specific about how we care for our ancestors. That seminar reminded us that our liturgy must clearly distinguish between "worshiping God" and "honoring ancestors." We need to be crystal clear: we pray to God for our ancestors; we don't worship our ancestors as gods.

Because of this, the Diocese established the "Veneration of Ancestors" rite in 1995 and updated it in 2010. Please notice: we use the word "venerate", not "worship". That one-word difference changes everything. In other words, we no longer see ancestors as gods—we give thanks to God—the Creator and Source of all life—while still keeping a space to cherish and remember those who came before us. That's why we set the Sunday before Lunar New Year's Eve as "Veneration of Ancestors Sunday." It's a day to learn gratitude—to thank God for passing life down to us through our ancestors and to remember our loved ones in the Lord.

Once you understand that background, look at today's Gospel from Matthew about the Transfiguration. You'll see a beautiful connection between this story, our lives, our ancestors, and our heritage of faith. The story starts with Jesus taking Peter, James, and John up a high mountain. In the Bible, "high mountains" are where people meet God—like Moses on Mount Sinai. Right there on

the mountain, Jesus was transformed. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. It's a powerful visual. It wasn't an illusion; It's as if Jesus briefly revealed what was behind his ordinary human appearance to give the disciples a tiny glimpse of his original glory as the Son of God.

Then, things get even more amazing: suddenly, Moses and Elijah appear and start talking to Jesus. Think about that for a second. Moses represents the "Law" and Elijah represents the "Prophets." To the people of Israel, these were the greatest ancestors of the faith. Moses had been gone for ages, and Elijah lived a long time before this too, yet here they are, standing and talking with Jesus. What does this tell us? It tells us that in God, people live forever. This is the "communion of saints." Whether it's the ancient saints or our own ancestors, as long as they are in God's plan for life, they haven't just vanished.

Then Peter couldn't stop himself. Feeling both scared and excited, he quickly said, *"Lord, it's great that we're here! If you want, I'll build three shelters: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."* Peter's idea was simple and very "human." He wanted to freeze the moment. He wanted to "enshrine" these three great figures. Doesn't that sound like us? When we see a great ancestor or a miracle, our first reaction is to build a temple or a shrine to keep them there so we can admire them.

But before Peter could even finish, a bright cloud covered them. This cloud represents God's presence. A voice came from the cloud: *"This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy. Listen to him!"* This sentence is very important. It was a correction for Peter. As great as Moses and Elijah were, they were just supporting characters pointing toward Christ. In that moment, God Himself spoke to shift everyone's focus from the "great men of the past" to the "Christ standing right in front of them."

The disciples were terrified and fell face-down on the ground. That's a natural reaction when you're faced with the total holiness of God. But Jesus came over, touched them, and said, "Get up. Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one but Jesus. The scene moves from the dramatic transfiguration and ancient figures back to the simple, real Jesus. It tells us that faith isn't about staying stuck in supernatural visions; it's about going back to real life with Christ by our side.

So, what does the Transfiguration have to say to Chinese Christians celebrating Veneration of Ancestors Sunday? First, Jesus' glory helps us put "ancestors" in the right perspective. When Peter wanted to build dwellings for Moses and Elijah, he was putting them on the same level as Jesus. But God's voice reminded him: only Jesus is the "Beloved Son" we must "listen to." This is a huge reminder for us: we respect and cherish our ancestors, but we don't "listen to" or obey the superstitious fears they might have left behind.

In our tradition, many people worship ancestors out of fear—fear that they'll be hungry or angry. But the Transfiguration shows us that people like Moses and Elijah are at rest in God's glory, present with Christ. If our ancestors knew the Lord, they are in that glory now; if they didn't, we entrust them to God's mercy. We don't need to "appease" them with offerings because Jesus Christ is

the source of life and rest. When we look at Jesus, we realize ancestors aren't spirits controlling our fate; they are fellow created beings standing before the Creator. We "venerate" ancestors to honor the legacy of life God gave us, but we "worship" God because only He is the Giver of Life.

Second, the Transfiguration reminds us that transformation is possible. Jesus showed his true glory on that mountain. This is a huge encouragement for those of us struggling between traditional family expectations and our modern faith. Sometimes we feel like family traditions are too heavy to change, or that our faith is too weak. But Jesus' Transfiguration shows us that when we are with God, our lives can be "illuminated." We can be a "different kind of descendant." Maybe in the past, ancestor rituals in your home were filled with smoke, heavy hearts, and anxiety. But you can "transfigure" that tradition. When your family gathers now, instead of worrying about what offerings to buy, you can share stories of your ancestors' virtues and thank God for the grace He gave your family. You don't have to run away from being Chinese; you just bring that identity to Jesus and let His glory transform our culture.

Finally, we have to remember that coming down the mountain is where filial piety really happens. The passage ends with Jesus leading the disciples back down. The mountain was beautiful, but life happens at the bottom. Similarly, Veneration of Ancestors Sunday isn't just about reading a liturgy or singing hymns in church. Real veneration is what you do when you leave here and go home. Sometimes we talk about honoring ancestors in church, but then we go home and argue with our parents or lose our patience with our elders. If we don't love the parents we *can* see, how can we say we respect the ancestors we *can't* see? Jesus went down the mountain to face pain, the cross, and the crowds. Our practice of "veneration" should show up in daily life: helping with chores during New Year, patiently listening to your elders tell the same story for the hundredth time, and bringing joy and peace to the dinner table. That honors God—and shows your family the light of Christ—way more than building a shrine or burning paper money ever could.

Brothers and sisters, today we aren't just following a church rule. We are declaring that our God is the God of the living. He is the Lord of history and the Lord of our families. As we pray at the veneration table in a moment, thank God in your heart. Give thanks to Him for guiding your great-grandparents, grandparents, and parents through the years so you could receive the gift of life. Ask God to give you Peter's passion, but also the courage to "go down the mountain."

This New Year, when you go home and face questions from relatives or traditional rituals, you can have confidence and peace. You can gently tell your family: *"In the Episcopal Church, we really value our ancestors too. We have a special day just for them. I don't use the traditional rituals, but I pray for our family before God every day, thanking Him for the good examples our ancestors left us."* May the glory of the Transfiguration light up every one of your homes. Let's keep our eyes on Jesus while we cherish the best parts of our culture. Because only He is the Savior and the hope for us, our families, and all who came before us.

Let us pray: Merciful Father, thank You for showing Your Son's glory on the mountain, letting us see that Christ is the Savior who transcends the Law and the Prophets. On this Veneration of

Ancestors Sunday, we thank You for the gift of life passed down through generations. Please remove any superstition or fear from our hearts. Help us learn to pray to You for our ancestors and to practice true filial piety in our daily lives. May Your glory go with us into the Lunar New Year, so we can be a beautiful witness to our families. We pray this in the holy name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

顯現日後最後主日暨教區敬祖主日講道

聖提摩太堂梁凡偉牧師於 2026 年 2 月 15 日

今天是顯現日後的最後一個主日，也是我們常說的「易容顯光」（Transfiguration）主日，但對我們台灣聖公會來說，今天還有另外一重的意義，那就是它也是我們教區的「敬祖主日」（veneration of ancestors）。說到「敬祖」這件事，可能會有些剛接觸信仰的朋友，或是家裡只有你一個人信主的弟兄姊妹，心裡有時會有一種莫名的壓力。在我們華人的社會裡，「祭拜祖先」這件事是許多家庭傳統的一部分。儒家的思想告訴我們要講「倫理」、要重視「家庭」，而這一切的核心就是「孝道」。可是，我們也知道，在很多家庭的祭祖活動中，往往混雜了許多迷信的成分，比如：擔心祖先沒錢花、害怕祖先回來討債，或是把祖先當成可以求財、求平安的神明來拜等等。這樣的「祭祖」文化，常常讓很多基督徒感到困擾：我不拿香，是不是就表示我不孝順？我不燒紙錢，是不是就是忘本？

其實，我們聖公會台灣教區自從設立以來，就一直非常看重這件事。我們不是要教友丟掉傳統，而是要幫助大家在信仰中找到孝道的真義。所以，我們不能迴避這個問題，因為這關係到我們如何向家人見證基督。為了這件事，本教區的三一神學中心（現為三一書院）特別在 1992 年 7 月 20 日舉辦了一場「祭祖」的研討會。當時邀請各方表達意見，目的非常明確，就是為了要「保存文化真義、訂定合宜的禮儀、免除信徒的困擾」。在那次研討會中，大家達成了一個很重要的共識。雖然我們在《使徒信經》和《尼吉亞信經》裡都宣告我們相信「聖徒相通」，教會也一直有為去世的人禱告的傳統，但過去我們確實比較少具體地表達對祖先的追念。那次研討會提醒我們，禮儀一定要分清楚「對上帝」和「對祖先」的區別。我們要明明白白地教導：我們是向上帝為祖先祈禱，而不是把祖先當作神來祭拜。

因此，本教區在 1995 年制定了基督徒的「敬祖禮」，並在 2010 年又做了一次修訂。請大家注意，我們用的是「敬」這個字，而不是「祭」。這一字之差，意義完全不同。這代表我們把原本對祖先「神明化」的祭拜，正確地轉變為對那位創造萬有的生命之主的感恩與崇拜，但同時，我們依然保存了對祖先的追思與感念。這就是為什麼我們訂定每年農曆除夕前的一個主日為「敬祖日」。這是一個讓我們學習感恩的日子，感謝上帝透過先祖將生命傳遞給我們，也讓我們在主裡思念那些先行一步回到天家的親人。

在了解這個背景之後，當我們讀到今天馬太福音關於耶穌「易容顯光」（Transfiguration）的經文，你會發現它跟我們的生命、跟我們的先人、跟我們的信仰傳承，有著非常奇妙的聯繫。故事發生在耶穌帶著彼得、雅各和約翰，暗暗地上了高山。在聖經裡，「高山」往往是與上帝相遇的地方，像是摩西上西奈山領受律法。就在山上，耶穌在他

們面前變了形象，他的臉面明亮如日頭，衣裳潔白如光。這是一個非常有視覺衝擊力的畫面，它不是一種幻覺，而是耶穌暫時揭開了他那身為人子、卑微僕人的外袍，讓門徒瞥見了他身為上帝之子原有的榮耀。

接著，更神奇的事情發生了：忽然，有摩西和以利亞向他們顯現，同耶穌說話。弟兄姊妹，請大家想一想，摩西代表的是「律法」，以利亞代表的是「先知」。這兩位是舊約以色列人心中最偉大的祖宗，是信仰的泰斗。摩西早就去世許久，以利亞也是很久以前的人了，但此時此刻，他們竟然與耶穌在一起說話。這說明了什麼？這說明在上帝那裡，人是永遠活著的。這就是我們信經裡說的「聖徒相通」。不管是古代的聖賢，還是我們的祖先，只要是在上帝的計畫裡，他們的生命都沒有消失。

這時候，我們那位心直口快的彼得又忍不住了。他看到這個場景，心裡大概是又驚訝又興奮，趕緊對耶穌說：「主啊，我們在這裡真好！你若願意，我就在這裡搭三座棚，一座為你，一座為摩西，一座為以利亞。」彼得的想法很單純，也很「人性化」。他想把這神聖的時刻留住，他想把這三位偉大的人物「供奉」起來。這像不像我們華人的思維？看到偉大的先人、看到神蹟，第一反應就是蓋個廟、搭個棚，把他們留在那裡受人景仰。

但彼得話還沒說完，一朵光明的雲彩遮蓋了他們。這雲彩代表的是上帝的臨在。從雲彩裡有聲音說：「這是我的愛子，我所喜悅的。你們要聽他！」這句話太關鍵了。這是在糾正彼得的看法。雖然摩西很偉大，以利亞很了不起，但他們都是引向基督的配角。在這一刻，上帝親自出聲，將所有人的焦點從「古代的偉人」轉移到「眼前的基督」身上。

門徒聽見這聲音，俯伏在地，極其害怕。這種恐懼是人在面對全然聖潔的上帝時的自然反應。但耶穌過來，對他們說：「起來，不要害怕！」當他們舉目不見一人，只見耶穌在那裡。這個轉變非常精彩：從華麗的變像、古代的聖賢，回歸到一個平凡但真實的耶穌。這告訴我們，信仰的最終點不是停留在超自然的幻象中，而是要在基督的陪伴下回到現實生活。

那麼，這段耶穌變像的故事，對於我們今天慶祝敬祖主日的華人基督徒，到底有什麼啟發呢？首先，耶穌的榮光讓我們重新看待「祖先」的定位。當彼得想為摩西和以利亞搭棚的時候，他其實是把他們跟耶穌放在了同等的位置上。但上帝的聲音提醒我們：只有耶穌是「愛子」，是我們必須「聽從」的那一位。這給了我們一個很重要的提醒：我們尊敬祖先、感念祖先，但我們不「聽命」於祖先，及因祭拜他們而留下的迷信或恐懼。

在華人傳統中，很多人祭拜祖先是因為「害怕」。怕祖先沒得吃、怕祖先不高興。但登山變像告訴我們，像摩西、以利亞這樣的我們先賢，他們在上帝的榮光中是安息的，是與基督同在的。我們的祖先如果是信主的，他們現在就在那樣的榮光中；如果他們尚未認識主，我們則把他們交託在上帝的手中。我們不需要透過「祭物」去安撫他們，因為耶穌基督才是生命與安息的源頭。當我們看著耶穌，我們就知道，祖先不再是掌控我們命運的神靈，而是與我們一起在創造主面前的受造者。我們「敬」祖先，是敬重上帝給我們的生命傳承；我們「拜」上帝，是因為只有祂是生命的賜予者。

再來，耶穌形象的改變，提醒我們「生命的蛻變」是可能的。耶穌在山上變了形象，展現出他原本的榮耀。這對我們這些在傳統禮教與現代信仰掙扎中的基督徒來說，是一個極大的鼓勵。有時候我們覺得，家裡的傳統太沈重，改不了；或者覺得自己的信仰不夠堅定。但耶穌的變像告訴我們，當我們與上帝同在時，我們的生命是可以被「光照」的。我們可以做

一個「不一樣的後代」。以前家裡祭拜祖先時可能是充滿煙燻、沈重與不安的氛圍，但現在我們可以把這個傳統「變像」。當我們全家人聚在一起，不再是討論要買什麼祭品，而是分享先人的美德，感謝上帝給我們這個家族的恩典，這就是一種生命的蛻變。我們不需要逃避華人的身份，而是要把這個身份帶到耶穌面前，讓祂的榮光來轉化我們的文化。

最後，我們要知道，從山上回到山下，才是孝道的實踐。經文最後說，耶穌帶著門徒下了山。山上雖然美好，但生活在山下。同樣的，敬祖主日不是只有在教堂裡讀讀禮文、唱唱詩歌。真正的敬祖，是在我們離開教會、回到家中後的具體行動。很多時候，我們在教會說要敬祖，但在家裡卻跟父母吵架、對長輩沒耐心。如果我們不愛眼前看得見的父母，又如何談得上尊敬看不見的祖先呢？耶穌下山，是要去面對痛苦、面對十字架、面對人群。我們「敬祖」的實踐，也應該是在日常生活中：過年回家時多幫忙家事，耐心地聽長輩講那些重複了幾百遍的往事，在餐桌上展現基督徒的喜樂與平安。這比蓋三座棚、比燒再多的紙錢都更能榮耀上帝，也更能讓家人看見基督的榮光。

弟兄姊妹們，今天我們在這裡慶祝敬祖主日，我們不只是在守一個教區的規定，我們是在宣告：我們的上帝是活人的上帝，祂是歷史的主，也是我們家族的主。當我們等一下在敬祖桌前禱告時，請你們在心中默默地感謝上帝。感謝祂讓你們的曾祖父母、祖父母、父母在歷史的長河中存在過，並把生命傳遞給你。同時也要祈求上帝，讓你們有彼得那樣的熱情，但更有下山的勇氣。今年過年，當你們回到家中，面對親戚朋友的詢問，或是面對家裡的祭祀場合時，可以更有自信、更有平安。你們可以溫和地告訴家人：「我們聖公會也非常重視祖先，我們有專門的敬祖日。我雖然不用傳統的方式祭拜，但我天天在上帝面前為我們家族祈禱，感謝祖先留給我們的德行。」

願耶穌基督那登山變像的榮光，照亮我們每個人的家庭。讓我們在保存文化美德的同時，始終定睛在耶穌身上。因為只有祂，是我們的生命、家庭以及所有先祖唯一的救贖與盼望。

讓我們一起禱告：慈悲的天父，感謝祂讓祂的愛子在山上顯現榮光，讓我們看見基督是超越律法與先知的救主。在敬祖主日，我們感謝祂透過歷代祖先將生命傳遞給我們。求祂除去我們心中的迷信與恐懼，讓我們學會向上帝為祖先祈禱，並在生活中實踐真誠的孝道。願祂的榮光伴隨我們進入農曆新年，在家人面前成為美好的見證。我們這樣禱告是奉救主耶穌基督的聖名禱告。阿們。