

## THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

Text: 2 Peter 1:16-21; St. Matthew 17:1-9

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Only three short weeks ago we reviewed the fact that the season of Epiphany is a season of revelation, and that the certainty of what is revealed is found in what has been made manifest, that is, what is revealed is clearly demonstrated to be true beyond all doubt.

Thus, writes Saint Peter, *“For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the FATHER honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved SON, in whom I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the HOLY SPIRIT.”*

So, we have been blessed, and faith in our SAVIOR, who is indeed, the only-begotten SON of God, has grown, even as we have watched our LORD grow from the Babe of Bethlehem, to a young Boy in His FATHER’s house doing His FATHER’s business, and to a young Man who has entered into His ministry of reconciliation to that same FATHER through the forgiveness of sin.

Today, we do not see GOD’s glory in signs and wonders, in the miracles JESUS performed; we see God’s glory in JESUS Himself. Today, we are granted to see the Man who has always been God. Thus, we are privileged to witness along with our LORD’s disciples the climax of this season, and with our LORD, come down from the Mount of Transfiguration with our eyes fixed on God’s holy city of Jerusalem in preparation for our LORD’s passion.

Let us then consider our LORD’s transfiguration.

We are all aware that things are not always as they appear to be, and first impressions are very often deceiving. Oftentimes, something or someone you thought you knew very well can surprise you. Sometimes, we may think we know everything

about someone with whom we have been close for a long time, only to be surprised by an action or a comment that seems completely foreign to their personality or what we *thought* we knew about them. Just ask any husband or wife. In the same manner, we can sometimes be completely surprised when we see something manifested, even when we already know it to be true. Just ask saints Peter, James, and John.

What was revealed on the Mount of Transfiguration was not really new to the three witnesses JESUS brought up the mountain with Him that day. Only one short week earlier, through St. Peter, JESUS' disciples had confessed JESUS to be "*...the CHRIST, the SON of the living God.*" Yet, the disciples did not seem to grasp the enormity of what they confessed.

When JESUS revealed to them what His being the CHRIST truly entailed, that He must travel to Jerusalem and there would suffer at the hands of the religious establishment, be handed over to the gentiles and killed, and then raised again on the third day, Peter was indignant, "*...Peter took [JESUS] aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, LORD; this shall not happen to You!'*" St. Peter had his own ideas about the MESSIAH, about what He should be, and how He should act, and crucifixion certainly was not part of Peter's plan.

It was no different on the mountain. Sts. Peter, James, and James' brother John followed JESUS up the mountain, and there JESUS was transfigured before them. "*His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.*"

Now, the word, "*transfiguration*" means to transform the figure or appearance of something. Still, it does not mean that a thing becomes something it is not. What the thing really is does not change, only its appearance changes. Like toasting bread or heating metal. When toasted, bread is transfigured; it becomes brown and warm, but it is still bread. When heated, metal is transfigured; it glows red with heat, but even in a liquid state, it is still metal. For our purposes, perhaps a moth or butterfly would better serve as an example. Both the moth and the butterfly begin as larvae we call caterpillars but generally become winged insects as adults. Yet, at no time are they something they have not always been, Lepidoptera, a class of insects.

On that mountain, for one short moment of time, the veil of CHRIST's humility was drawn aside, and JESUS' humanity was transfigured by His divinity, allowing His glory to peek through. Every part of His Body glowed with the glory that belongs to God alone. So it is, that in the account of the Transfiguration of our LORD, we see things the way they *truly* are and not the way they ordinarily appeared. JESUS' transfiguration is an epiphany event. Indeed, as an epiphany, the transfiguration of CHRIST is second only to JESUS' resurrection, the Epiphany of all epiphanies. With this event, JESUS is revealed as He always has been and as He always will be—as "*the SON of the living God.*"

Thus, the transfiguration event occurred to reveal and make manifest to Peter, James, and John that JESUS truly is the CHRIST, the SEED promised by God the FATHER to Eve and Abraham, the MESSIAH foretold by the prophets, and the CHRIST announced by the angels, now made manifest in JESUS, God's SON. Still, it revealed something more.

The disciples saw and heard JESUS as He talked with Moses and Elijah. Their discussion was not just small talk; they talked of, as St. Luke relates, JESUS' ἔξοδον, that is, His exodus, or more precisely, His death in Jerusalem. There, in that holy city, darkness would endeavor to snuff out the Light forever. The disciples overheard this conversation and feared what had been revealed and their troubled hearts were unable to comprehend all that this meant. They still did not know that JESUS is the Light no darkness can overcome. So, they wished to remain on that mountain. They wished to avoid the sorrows and grief and the horrors to come. They thought that there had to be a better way.

Does this sound familiar? It should. We too would avoid the suffering and death of CHRIST. We do not want to be reminded that our sins caused the suffering and death of JESUS. I believe this is the primary reason that the sight of a crucifix so bothers, even angers, many Christians. Every wound, every nail, every thorn, every stripe, was the price of our sins. Our sins nailed JESUS to His Cross; His innocent suffering and death were the price for our salvation. But this truth we cannot abide, and so we want to hide the Body of CHRIST away and run from the manger to the resurrection hoping not to trip on His Cross along the way.

But the transfiguration of our LORD does not exclude but is defined by the suffering and death of JESUS. GOD's glory includes CHRIST's suffering and death. Without it, there is no resurrection, and without the resurrection, there can be no forgiveness of sin. You see, it is all of one package, the nativity, Epiphany, Holy Week, Good Friday, and the resurrection of our LORD, all one and all for you. Remove any one and it all comes tumbling down like a house of cards and we are still lost.

Therefore, Peter's request and your desire to remain on that mountain for even a little longer could never have been granted because GOD had not yet accomplished what He was going to do for you through the death of JESUS, His SON. Until JESUS' suffering and glorification were accomplished on the Cross, the purposes of GOD were not finished.

The supreme act of Christian faith is not that we see GOD's glory in the light of the transfiguration, but in the death of JESUS upon the Cross for the life of the world. For there is no other GOD than the One who reveals Himself in JESUS, and there is no other JESUS than He who died for us upon the Cross of Calvary and was raised again for us on the third day. This is JESUS as He always has been and always will be.

Therefore, let us now begin our journey with JESUS, “*the Lamb slain from the foundations of the world,*” and travel up to Jerusalem, and there, receive from our LORD His Body and Blood given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins. For in these is the glory of God and the life of the Church.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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