

February 28, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Every year on this Second Sunday of Lent we reflect on an event called the “Transfiguration”. The word itself comes from two Greek words that mean to change one's appearance. This year's Gospel passage this week comes from St. Mark:

Jesus took Peter, James, and John
and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves.
And he was transfigured before them,
and his clothes became dazzling white,
such as no fuller on earth could bleach them.
Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses,
and they were conversing with Jesus.
Then Peter said to Jesus in reply,
“Rabbi, it is good that we are here!
Let us make three tents:
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”
He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified.
Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them;
from the cloud came a voice,
“This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.”
Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone
but Jesus alone with them.

As they were coming down from the mountain,
he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone,
except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead.
So they kept the matter to themselves,
questioning what rising from the dead meant. *Mark 9:2-10*

Just prior to taking Saints Peter, James, and John, whom we refer to as the "pillars" of the "college" of the Twelve Apostles, Jesus had shared with His disciples that He would have to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die on the Cross. He then discussed how His Apostles would have to take up their own crosses to follow Him if they wanted to be true disciples. Of course, at that point none of the Apostles really understood what He was talking about. In order to show them His Resurrected Glory, He took them up on the mountain to give them a glimpse of what He would look like at the time of His Resurrection although He had not yet died. He did this for several reasons:

- 1) So that His Apostles would remember that He had told them about and showed them His Resurrection before it happened so that they would remember His prediction when it finally occurred and relay this afterwards to all believers.
- 2) To strengthen them with His Divine Presence before the ordeal they would undergo during His Crucifixion. Unfortunately, two out of three ran away from the Cross on Good Friday. St. John stayed with Mary at the foot of the Cross.
- 3) To show that He was the fulfillment of all the prophecies in the Old Testament that had been passed down through the Law (represented by the appearance of Moses) and the Prophets (represented by the appearance of Elijah, the greatest of prophets).
- 4) To show them that He was not only fully human, but also God the Son, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, who showed them His Glory as God and would reveal Himself even more fully as God at His Resurrection and Ascension.

The Three Apostles were, at the time, of course, even more bewildered at the top of Mount Tabor during the Transfiguration than they were when Jesus predicted His crucifixion. Many times, when God is revealing Himself to us, we are unable to realize what happened between Him and ourselves until after the encounter happens. Lord, help us to recognize You when You make Yourself known to us in prayer, in the Sacraments, and in the events of everyday life!

Important for us is the reality that Jesus makes Himself known to us in and through the Sacraments. Because Jesus gives us His own Divine Life in the seven sacraments, especially in the Blessed Sacrament, the Eucharist, He is transfiguring us to be like Him. He is filling us with the very divinity of God every time we receive the Sacraments worthily and with an open heart. If we only understood that Jesus is transfiguring us to be like God when we receive the Sacraments, we would want to receive them as often as possible and make them the center of our lives. Who wouldn't want to be filled with God Himself? The more often we receive the Sacraments, especially Confession and Holy Communion, the more like God we become. What God does for us in the Sacraments is our ultimate fulfillment and happiness!

When we come to Mass we ascend to the spiritual mountain of heaven on earth because Jesus makes Himself present as our Lord and our God on the altar. The sanctuary of the church represents the Heavenly Jerusalem where the Presence of God dwells. In reflecting on the event of the Transfiguration, in his book "*Jesus of Nazareth*", Pope Benedict discusses the spiritual meaning of Jesus taking the Apostles to the top of the mountain:

“When we inquire into the meaning of the mountain, the first point is of course the general background of mountain symbolism. The mountain is the place of ascent—not only outward, but also inward ascent; it is a liberation from the burden of everyday life, a breathing in of the pure air of creation; it offers a view of the broad expanse of creation and its beauty; it gives one an inner peak to stand on and an intuitive sense of the Creator. History then adds to all this the experience of the God who speaks, and the experience of the Passion, culminating in the sacrifice of Isaac, in the sacrifice of the lamb that points ahead to the definitive Lamb sacrificed on Mount Calvary. Moses and Elijah were privileged to receive God’s Revelation on the mountain, and now they are conversing with the One who is God’s Revelation in person.”

In today's first reading, we also hear of the sacrifice of a lamb in place of Abraham's only son Isaac. Abraham offered the lamb on the mountain, in place of Isaac, as a foretelling of the sacrifice Jesus offered in our place on Mount Calvary. Jesus' journey would go from Mount Tabor, to Mount Calvary, to the Mount of the Transfiguration, and finally to the eternal Mountain of God the Heavenly Jerusalem!

Lent therefore is the time to be "transfigured" once again or more deeply by God's grace in the Sacraments. Remember to make a good Confession and even to come more frequently to Mass and to Holy Communion. It is there that the bread and wine are actually transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ which is a miracle just as great, if not greater, than the Transfiguration itself. It is worthy to note that the top of Mt. Tabor overlooks the Plain of Meggido which is mentioned in the Book of Revelation as the place of the great and final battle (Armageddon) at the end of time. Jesus, at the end of time, will transform the universe into a new creation after these final events:

The sixth angel emptied his bowl on the great river Euphrates. Its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings of the East. I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet. These were demonic spirits who performed signs. They went out to the kings of the whole world to assemble them for the battle on the great day of God the almighty. ("Behold, I am coming like a thief." Blessed is the one who watches and keeps his clothes ready, so that he may not go naked and people see him exposed.) They then assembled the kings in the place that is named Armageddon in Hebrew. The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air. A loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, "It is done." Then there were lightning flashes, rumblings, and peals of thunder, and a great earthquake. It was such a violent earthquake that there has never been one like it since the human race began on earth. The great city was split into three parts, and the gentile cities fell. But God remembered great Babylon, giving it the cup filled with the wine of his fury and wrath. Every island fled, and mountains disappeared. Large hailstones like huge weights came down from the sky on people, and they blasphemed God for the plague of hail because this plague was so severe. *Revelation 16:12-21*

Then I saw the heavens opened, and there was a white horse; its rider was [called] "Faithful and True." He judges and wages war in righteousness. His eyes were [like] a fiery flame, and on his head were many diadems. He had a name inscribed that no one knows except himself. He wore a cloak that had been dipped in blood, and his name was called the Word of God. The armies of heaven followed him, mounted on white horses and wearing clean white linen. Out of his mouth came a sharp sword to strike the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod, and he himself will tread out in the wine press the wine of the fury and wrath of God the almighty. He has a name written on his cloak and on his thigh, "King of kings and Lord of lords." Then I saw an angel standing on the sun. He cried out [in] a loud voice to all the birds flying high overhead, "Come here. Gather for God's great feast, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of military officers, and the flesh of warriors, the flesh of horses and of their riders, and the flesh of all, free and slave, small and great." Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered to fight against the one riding the horse and against his army. The beast was caught and with it the false prophet who had performed in its sight the signs by which he led astray those who had accepted the mark of the beast and those who had worshiped its image. The two were thrown alive into the fiery pool burning with sulfur. The rest were killed by the sword that came out of the mouth of the one riding the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh. *Revelation 19:11-21*

We participate in that great and final battle now when we fight against sin and evil in our lives. If we persevere, God will be victorious in us on the last day! May Jesus be victorious over sin and spiritual death in our personal lives this Lent by His Transfiguring Grace in our souls!

In The Glory of the Transfiguration,
Fr. Derda, Fr. Steve, Deacon Russ & Deacon Ed