

The Transfiguration of Our Lord
St. Matthew 17:1-9; 2 Peter 1:16-21

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

"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."

Here we are, just one week removed from hearing about the heavens opening up for Jesus after coming out of the waters of the Jordan, and the voice from heaven thundering, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17) Now, we advance just under three years later in the span of a week, and Jesus, Peter, James, and John are at the top of a mountain where Jesus is transfigured before them. Moses and Elijah join them. Peter, enraptured with everything going on, wants to build tabernacles for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. He is interrupted by the voice thundering from heaven once again: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

As they come down the mountain, Peter, James, and John hear Jesus tell them not to tell anyone what had happened. They were to wait. Jesus still had to suffer for the sins of the world. He still had to die on the cross. He still had to be placed in a grave and announce to the souls in prison His victory. (cf. 1 Peter 3:19) And He still had to rise from the dead. Jesus' three disciples would know that they could tell everyone about their mountain top experience once they had seen Jesus again after His resurrection. What you heard from today's epistle is St. Peter doing just that.

You see, what happened on the mountain wasn't for everyone. It wasn't meant to be seen or heard by everyone at the time. It was even different than other heaven-opening, glory-of-God events—so much so that today's text doesn't even say that heaven opened! It seems quite the opposite, as a cloud enveloped all on the top of the mountain before the voice from heaven shook them.

Peter, James, and John were privileged to get a glimpse of eternity as Jesus was transfigured before them, then that glimpse was clouded from their view as the full-on glory of God spoke to them. "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" "Don't tell anyone yet," Jesus says. To reveal Jesus' and the Father's glory before He had risen from the dead would be counter to Jesus' word, for one, and counter to His work of salvation, for another. And so, for the three disciples, the glory of the Father was veiled, and Jesus told them to hold their tongues. Still, it was good for them to be there.

It was good for you that they were there, dear Baptized. These three, the inner circle of Jesus' disciples, were given a lesson that they were then able to teach, as St. Peter relates in today's epistle. They didn't follow cunningly devised fables. To have built the tabernacles on the mountain top would be to turn Jesus, Moses, and Elijah into cunningly devised fables.

Bear with me for a moment. Had the voice not interrupted Peter, had it not told him to listen to Jesus, had Jesus not told them to be quiet about what had happened, then Peter, James, and John would have built those tabernacles. They would have come down from the mountain and told everyone what had happened. They would have told the people about the tabernacles. They would have told people that those tabernacles were inhabited by Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Can you see where this is going?

People would flock to the mountain to see these tabernacles. The area would become something of a shrine in honor of and perhaps worship of Moses and Elijah. Jesus would be seen on par with these two prophets as opposed to the Son of Man sent to die in order to save them from their sins.

A false cult of some sort would develop. As a result, people go to the mountain instead of hearing Jesus.

Think of reports of miracles today. An image of the virgin Mary is seen in the reflection of a high rise building. The likeness of Jesus is seen in a piece of toast. Waters blessed by a certain priest or saint are told to have miraculous powers. You can find bits and pieces of wood that are said to be pieces of Jesus' manger or cross, or perhaps a fragment of clothing or bone said to belong to someone else in the Bible. Snake oil salesmen parade themselves on television to perform what appears to be healings, putting on a good show—the lame walking, the blind being able to see, cancers disappearing, among many other things.

What happens? People start looking to these people, places, and things for some sort of miracle for themselves. "Perhaps Mary can help me to prosper." "God will love me more if I reverence the piece of Jesus toast." "God will bless my endeavor if I spritz myself with this holy water." "God will protect me if I carry a piece of Jesus' cross with me." "I am ready to be done with this illness, and the guy on T.V. can help me."

It's a tempting thought. Who wouldn't want a little more money in their wallets? Who wouldn't want to be healed from every disease? Who wouldn't be tempted to trust in a trinket or some "holy water" for protection?

Cunningly devised fables, every one of them. Nowhere in God's Word does He promise any of this. The Word points you to Jesus, not trinkets or water or miracle healers—and the miraculous healings that did happen in the Scriptures were there to confirm that Jesus is the promised One and to confirm the Word of the Apostles as being the Word of God.

At the Transfiguration, the Father tells Peter, James, and John to listen to Jesus. And, in turn, Peter, James, and John instruct you to do the same. From the pen of Peter you heard, "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."

That dark place is your sinful heart. Therein, your Old Man seeks all kinds of ways apart from God's Word for prosperity, health, and salvation. But into the darkness of your hearts has a light shined. That light is the same by which Jesus was transfigured on the mountain; for into your hearts has His glory shone by way of your baptism, whereat you were proclaimed a son of God. And it is that light by which, then, you heed the Word of God, which comes to you not in your own interpretation, nor by your own will, but given to you as to the Church from the holy men of God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit to write down for your hearing the wonderful deeds of the Lord, and then also as other holy men of God, sent by Him to proclaim that Word, do so in your hearing to bring to you and give to you exactly what the Word of God says.

That Word of God gives you forgiveness, life, and salvation. The light of God's Word pierces the darkness of your heart, as it did at your baptism, and purifies you, cleansing you from all sin, bringing you out of death to life, and giving you the very merits of the perfect life of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And in doing all of this, the light prepares you for the life to come, which is yours now by way of baptism into Jesus Christ, but not yet as He has not yet returned.

On that day when the Morning Star rises, your flesh that now withers like the grass (cf. Psalm 102:11; 103:15) will be transfigured like Jesus was on the holy mountain. Hear it from St. Paul, who also got to witness Jesus' transfigured flesh on another opportunity (cf. Acts 9:3-4):

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. (1 Corinthians 15:51-53)

Let these words comfort you, who still now struggle with a heart of darkness. The Light of Christ peers into that darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it. (cf. John 1:5) This is for you because God has joined Himself to human flesh and filled human flesh with His own Godhead in His incarnation: "[i]n Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." (Colossians 2:9) And since God has joined Himself to you in His own flesh, your flesh will be transfigured like His was on the holy mountain, as I said, because you will be like He is and see Him like He is. (cf. 1 John 3:2)

What is He like now? Ascended! Glorified! Filling all things, including you! Look at Moses and Elijah, how they also shined like Jesus on the holy mountain. These saints of God are but a precursor of your life in Christ in eternity. These now dwell bodily with Jesus, especially Elijah who was assumed to heaven in a whirlwind. (cf. 2 Kings 2:11)

For on the great day when the Morning Star appears, the trumpet will sound, and you who are baptized and believed will rise to meet Jesus in the clouds. From there, the Lord will take you to be where He is now, where He has prepared a place for you. (cf. John 14:1-4) In the eternal presence of God is a prosperity unlike anything you could imagine here. In the eternal presence of God is the place where no malady or ailment can touch you. In the eternal presence of God, where there is a place prepared for you, you are perfect, for you will be like He is.

All of this is yours because after coming down from the mountain, having told Peter, James, and John to be quiet about it, Jesus went to Jerusalem to suffer and die for you. He, who filled human flesh like yours with His own Godhead, took into that flesh your sins and every ailment, and shed His blood on the cross to redeem you from it. The heavens were opened and all the wrath of God was leveled against Jesus for the darkness of your heart and the hearts of all men. He suffered humiliation to the point of death on the cross in order that in Him you might be glorified. Now, risen and ascended, still bearing the marks of your redemption, Jesus is fully glorified at the right hand of majesty where He rules and directs all things for your benefit.

And so it was that the heavens were opened to you at the font and you received a taste of the glory of God as you were proclaimed His own son, bought with the blood of His only-begotten Son. This the Word of God tells you, and in your New Man, as you are in Christ, you hear Him in His Word. It is the very same Word which tells you all of this is yours because you are in Jesus Christ, tucked safe into His pierced side, and in Him, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.