

Feast of the Transfiguration

Introduction

You know, sometimes I think that the Transfiguration deserves a lot more attention than we tend to give it. We encounter this mystery twice during the liturgical year – a Gospel account of the Transfiguration is always read on the 2nd Sunday of Lent as a way of spurring us on during our Lenten penance; and today, August 6th, is designated as the Feast of the Transfiguration. Even though we meet up with this mystery twice a year, it doesn't make the same impact on us as Christmas or Good Friday or Easter.

Scripture, of course, *does* give the Transfiguration its due. This event, wherein Christ revealed his glory before the awestruck apostles, Peter, James, and John – this event is described in *three* Gospels *and* in the 2nd Letter of St. Peter. In those accounts, the Transfiguration is presented as the high point of Jesus' ministry, for here, on the heights of Tabor, Jesus not only reveals in human flesh the divine glory that is his for all eternity but he also reveals how *we* are to be transformed so as to share the glory of God.

Moreover, as the Christian Tradition developed and unfolded, learned writers and saints have seen in the mystery of the Transfiguration the model or the paradigm for the sacramental life of the Church. The glory of God the Father can touch us and change us only when, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we have contact with the Body of Christ. In truth, the splendor, the beauty, the brilliance of God's glory shining forth in the mortal body of the Incarnate Son of God is the foundation for the entire sacramental life of the Church and it manifests to us what it is God wants to bring about in the humanity of those who follow His Son unreservedly. As one author put it, "What we call the sacraments are in fact the divinizing actions of the Body of Christ in our very humanity" (Corbon, *Wellspring of Worship*, 95).

The Glory of God: The Spirit of the Lord

But what is this radiance, this glory, this beauty revealed to us atop Mt. Tabor? Scripture tells us that the glory of Jesus witnessed by the three Apostles is not due to any earthly cause. The brilliance of Jesus' garments is not due to any detergent or whitening agent. St. Mark gives us this description: "His clothes became dazzling

white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them.” Scripture also teaches us that the glory of Jesus is not a myth; that Peter, James, and John did not invent this vision or imagine it. Listen again to the words of St. Peter: “We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eye witnesses of his majesty.” Nor did Jesus’ glory consist in his fame or popularity nor even his glittering ability to outwit his opponents.

What, then, is God’s glory? Scripture describes God’s glory as light. Indeed, Jesus refers to himself as “the light of the world.” In 2nd Corinthians, St. Paul writes, “For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Yet even this does not answer the question of what God’s glory is, because “light” is but an earthly image made to describe a heavenly reality.

Dear friends, when we persist in asking what God’s glory is we will find, with St. Gregory of Nyssa, that the glory of God revealed in the Transfiguration ultimately is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who appeared as a cloud overshadowing Jesus at the Transfiguration, the Spirit who is the bond of charity and the bond of unity between the Father and his beloved Son. The glory of Jesus is his complete union of love with the Father, a union of love so complete and so perfect that it is not just an idea or a feeling but a Person, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Spirit, for “God is love”.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “The glory you gave me, I have given to them”, that is, to his disciples. And Jesus did indeed give his glory to his disciples, after his Resurrection, when he said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit”, the Holy Spirit who pours forth the love of God into our hearts, forgives our sins, and binds us together in a marvelous unity of faith. [Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, Homily on The Song of Songs, Liturgy of the Hours, Vol. II, p. 958]

Charity and Unity

So, you might say that when we climb Mt. Tabor with Peter, James, and John our eyes of faith behold the divine origin of that charity and unity which are at the heart of our beloved Order, the Knights of Columbus. Father McGivney didn’t just invent

these principles but he drew them from the very heart of the Gospels he knew and loved so well. He knew that if we were to share the glory of God we must be people who are united in charity: united in opening our hearts to the love of God poured forth by the Holy Spirit; united in bearing witness to the love of God we have received by leading lives of unhesitating charity, especially on behalf of the poor, the sick, and the vulnerable.

Somewhere St. John Paul II referred to the witness of holy men and women as “transfigured lives capable of amazing the world.” Father McGivney’s charity as a parish priest revealed a soul that had been transfigured, changed, transformed by the Holy Spirit into the living image of God’s glory, that is to say, his love. How many lives has Father McGivney’s ministry changed and transformed? We are attracted to the saints and blessed of the Order, such as the Mexican martyrs, because, in laying down their lives in self-giving love for the sake of the faith, they manifested in their flesh the glory of God revealed in the flesh of Christ. Thus were their relics carried in procession today with great reverence.

Now as we listen to the names of the members of our Order and their loved ones who have gone home to the Lord during this past fraternal year, let us pray for them. Let us pray earnestly that they who sought to put into practice the principles of charity, unity, and fraternity may now fully share in the glory of God’s self-giving love, manifested by the Incarnate Son of God on the Mountain of the Transfiguration. We pray that in his mercy the Lord will forgive their sins and imperfections and make their souls ready for the perfect love, the perfect glory of heaven. United in charity, we offer for them the One Sacrifice that brings salvation to all the world, and we receive the flesh and blood of Christ by which we touch the transforming love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Vivat Jesus!