

The transfiguration

Second Sunday of Lent

By Fr. Gonzalo Meza¹



In this second Sunday of Lent, we read the passage of the transfiguration of Jesus. The Church presents this reading to prepare us for the Passion of Our Lord, to be ready to face “the scandal of the cross.” To undergo through the cross we need to know its goal and final destiny, the Glory of God.

The Gospel of Mathew said “Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them (Mt 17: 1-2).” Those three disciples were part of the “inner circle” of Jesus, the ones who would be with him during decisive moments of his life. Why did Jesus take them to the mountain? Mountains in the Bible are the places of communication of God and therefore

divine revelation. In the Old Testament Patriarchs and Prophets would go to a mount to pray and prepare themselves for God’s mission. Moses and Elijah are two examples, the first went to Mount Horeb to receive the tablets of the ten commandments.

Matthew continues, “Jesus was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them.” The white garments show the glory of Jesus. Jesus appears in his Glory with two persons: Moses and Elijah, who represent the law, and the prophets. Their presence at the transfiguration points to the fulfillment of God promises made to Moses and Elijah in the Old Testament. “Moses the legislator and Elias the prophet-champion of Yahwism show by their presence that the old order is not destroyed but fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus -fulfilled even in the ‘scandal’ of the Cross.”²

When Peter saw the Lord transfigured and him speaking with Moses and Elijah, Peter did not understand but he knew that the presence of God in his glory was the supreme good he could experience. He said, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” Peter wanted to remain for a long time in such state of contemplation and happiness. Here on earth it is not possible to do so because that is our promise for heaven, the “beatific vision”, the eternal contemplation of God. Here on earth we can get a glimpse of the glory of God when we pray with the Gospel in our hands in front of the Most Holy Eucharist, in adoration. The Eucharist, where Jesus is truly, really and substantially present constitutes the tent in which he decided to stay with us on earth until the end times. The Gospel is the tent of God’s word.

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² Jones, A. (1953). The Gospel of Jesus Christ according to St Matthew. In B. Orchard & E. F. Sutcliffe (Eds.), *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (p. 882). Toronto;New York;Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson.

This marvelous scene is added with another detail: a cloud overshadowing them and a voice coming from it, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." It was the voice of God the Father, the same that talked to Moses, the same that talked to Abraham, the same that was upon Jesus when he was baptized.

Why did Jesus was transfigured before his three disciples? It happened to show to them the reward of discipleship and to animate them to endure the scandal of the cross. With his transfiguration Jesus told them that to get to the glory of God (to be worthy to wear the white garments of saints in glory) we must walk the way of the cross. Therefore, the transfiguration was a preparation for the Apostles to suffer the Passion of Christ, and later their own passion. All the brightness of the glory of God served to encourage the Apostles, so that in moments of weakness, hardships and tribulations, they would remember their final destiny and the final goal of those sufferings. "For after he had told the disciples of his coming Death, on the holy mountain he manifested to them his glory, to show, even by the testimony of the law and the prophets, that the Passion leads to the glory of the Resurrection" (Preface, Second Sunday of Lent).³

A short time after the transfiguration the Lord would celebrate the Last Supper, and then his Passion. James and John were with him at the transfiguration, on Mount Tabor; and they were also with him at Gethsemane, when the heart of our Redeemer was weighed down in anguish; when he was sad even unto death.

The cost of discipleship is the cross, but the reward of discipleship is the glory of God. A glimpse of his glory in this earth and the fullness of it in Heaven. In our own lives, as Christians we face challenges, sufferings and tribulations of all kinds. They are the crosses that we and the Lord take up along our life. But the cross is not our final destiny. The final goal is life eternal and the cross is the way to get there.

In times of trials we need to remember the many times that Jesus was transfigured to reveal his glory to us. He was transfigured in our lives many times, especially through the great blessings which we received from God's hands. For example the birth of a child, the marriage in Church of family members, and even the moments of intense prayer in which God reveal himself to your soul.

The Gospel of Luke mentions an important detail about the transfiguration, "Jesus took Peter, John and James and went up the mountain to pray. While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white" (Lk 9: 28-29). Pope Benedict XVI said, "The Transfiguration is a prayer event, in praying, Jesus is immersed in God, closely united to him, adhering with his own human will to the loving will of the Father" (Pope Benedict XVI, *Angelus* Feb. 18, 2008). One of the moments in which we can experience the glory of God is in prayer, where God is transfigured and shines in our souls. St. Alphonsus of Liguori said "How great is the sweetness which a soul experiences, when, in the time of prayer, God, by a ray of his own light, shows to her his goodness and his mercies towards her."⁴

³ The Roman Missal: Renewed by Decree of the Most Holy Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Promulgated by Authority of Pope Paul VI and Revised at the Direction of Pope John Paul II. (2011). (Third Typical Edition, p. 228). Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

⁴ Liguori, A. M. (1882). Second Sunday of Lent: On Heaven. In N. Callan (Trans.), *Sermons for All the Sundays in the Year* (Eighth Edition, p. 122). Dublin; London: James Duffy & Sons.

In times of trials, look up in prayer to the Mount to see Jesus and have hope. “I have asked you to keep on lifting your eyes up to Heaven as you go about your work, because hope encourages us to grasp hold of the strong hand which God never ceases to reach out to us, to keep us from losing our supernatural point of view” (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, no. 213).

For further meditation

The goal of these forty days of the Lenten season is to prepare us for the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord. To do so it is necessary to experience the conversion of heart, which means the total transformation and renewal of mind. A true conversion involves the cleanup of our minds and hearts from evil ways, so that we can make room to receive the refreshing grace of God. A conversion is a process, and it does not happen overnight or in a weekend, unless there are miracles. Conversion is a lifelong process, which requires to empty our hearts and minds from old vices, to embrace the heart and mind of Christ. We can do so by leaving aside the old “I”, to be open to receive from Jesus Christ the new self as St. Paul said, “you should put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth.”⁵

⁵ *New American Bible*. (2011). (Revised Edition, Eph 4: 22–24). Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.