

Sermon for the Transfiguration of our Lord – Matthew 17:1-9

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths,” St. Peter said, “when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.” Peter was an eyewitness of Jesus’ majesty and glory. The Transfiguration was one of many ways which the Christ revealed Himself to be God. Peter, James, and John witnessed the majesty of God shine through His Son when He was transfigured on the mountain. Peter says more on this in His second letter to the church: “For when [Jesus] received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with Him on the holy mountain.” On the mount of transfiguration, Peter, James, and John could clearly see that this man, the Christ, was God. He was glory. He was majesty. He was eternal. He was holy.

But it wasn’t only on this mount of transfiguration that Peter and the other disciples sensed the reflection of God’s glory in the Christ. The words which He spoke to the Pharisees, Sadducees, temple authorities, and to all the crowds contained rare power and great authority. The disciples saw the glory of God shine forth when He performed manifold miracles; miracles which we have heard again this epiphany season: water turned to wine at the Cana wedding and His healing of a leper and the centurion’s servant. These alone drove home the point that Jesus was no mere prophet, no mere good and wise teacher, no mere learned interpreter of the Law. He was the revealed glory of God in word and deed; through wisdom and through miracles. The Son of Man was quite a bit more than a regular prophet. One had to acknowledge He was right or say that He was out of His mind and possessed by an evil spirit. Anyone in first century Judea could see the glory of God shine through Christ through His sayings and actions. This was a mystery that was noticed by all, but not all did interpret it correctly. The crowd of 5,000 in John chapter 6 interpreted the multiplication of bread and fish as the Christ being only a bread king to fill bellies. It was after Jesus’ death that John, one of our Lord’s closest disciples, could confess, “... we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.” And Peter rightly confessed the revealed God, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God.”

And yet, this question of how God’s glory was to be fully revealed in Christ Jesus remained mysterious to Peter and the other disciples. Could our Lord’s transfiguration clear up the confusion and unlock the mystery? “After six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them, and His face shown like the sun, and His clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with Him. And Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.’” Peter had found God in the way in which he wanted to worship Him. In glory, in majesty, in

bright and shining clothing. The whole law (depicted in Moses) was there. The totality of the prophets (depicted in Elijah) was there. The Christ Himself shined in glory. Let us not give any care to the rest of the world, let us bask in this glory forever. This is how Peter wanted to worship God. He doesn't want to talk about his sinful condition. He doesn't want to worship the God who will die on a cross. Peter had determined that he knew best how God should be worshiped by him.

But isn't that how we also think? We want the shining majesty of God who makes us feel good, and not so much the Forgiver of Sins. We want to see God, but not in water and Word, or bread and wine. We want to hear God speaking to us, but not through some common man reading from a book. In short, we want the glory, but not the cross. But it doesn't end there. We want to serve our neighbor the best way we see fit. We will give the time and energy that we determine, and not that which they need. Much like a convicted criminal would take a plea bargain, we bear the least-painful, self-imposed cross that we feel best suits us, but not necessarily the cross God would have for us. We want the glory, but not the cross.

When our Lord came down from the mount of transfiguration with His disciples, He sternly "commanded them, "Tell no one this vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead." At numerous other Gospel accounts of miraculous healings and the casting out of demons, the Lord gives the disciples and the crowds this warning, that they should tell no one until the Son of Man is raised from the dead. Why would this be? Because in Jesus, glory is inseparable from the cross. All His revealed miracles and teachings, yes and even the transfiguration itself, find their indivisible meaning in His death. 2 times in Matthew's Gospel the Lord is described as having a bright shining countenance and clothing: the transfiguration and the resurrection. Before His transfiguration, Christ foretells His death to his disciples, "that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." Glory is inseparable from the cross. Jesus followed the Father's will perfectly. He bore the cross that we would not bear. He drank the cup that we would not drink. He died for us. He gives His life and forgiveness to us today in His Body and in His Blood.

Immediately before the transfiguration, the Lord tells his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Glory is inseparable from the cross. St. Paul said in his letter to the church at Galatia, "... far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." Paul found his greatest glory in the cross. We can do no better. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠