

Majestic Glory
2nd Sunday of Lent (B)
(Mk 9:2-10)

The Transfiguration is an important turning point in the public ministry of Jesus. It marks the beginning of his final 40-day¹ journey to Jerusalem. In all the time Jesus dwelt on earth, his divinity remained concealed in his humanity. Only by means of his miracles and authority over spiritual forces did people question, “Who is this?” “How can this man act with the very power of God?” The one exception occurred in the Transfiguration, when he showed himself to the three “pillar” apostles on the top of the holy mountain.

There, what was invisible became visible, what was hidden showed forth: they beheld his divine glory, shining through his humanity. The Gospel tells us his face, skin, and clothes became brilliant with the “majestic glory” (2P 1:17), like lighting, brighter than any conceivable whiteness on earth.²

This experience was not to last long, even though Peter wished to remain there forever. The reason Jesus revealed himself in this way was to strengthen and prepare them for what was to come. Forty days later, the same three apostles would again see Jesus “transfigured” in the Garden of Gethsemane and on Calvary; not by the majestic glory of God, but by the extremity of human suffering.

The Transfiguration was given to these apostles because their testimony would be the foundation of the early Church. In the Transfiguration is a vision and assurance of the Resurrection to come. It is through his passion that Jesus will attain to his resurrection; it is through the cross that the Church too, will attain its glory, and every disciple. While we are on the journey, the vision of the Transfiguration strengthens and prepares us. Jesus gives every disciples something of the Transfiguration, according to their particular role in the Church and the crosses they will have to carry.

The grace of the Transfiguration is made available to us in the sacraments, and especially the Mass. We should understand the Mass as a mini Transfiguration, where the divinity of Christ is manifested through the ordinary, and where transforming grace is given in our lives. We attend Mass not simply out of a sense of duty, but in response to the invitation of the Lord, who invites us to be with him for a time, and share in the intimacy of the Trinitarian Communion. The Mass is a privileged time, “it is good to be here.” As the apostles discovered,

¹ According to tradition

² When Moses went up the mountain in the time of Exodus, he had a similar encounter with the overshadowing glory of God, to the degree that when he returned to the people this glory of God was still shining on *his* face, which had to be veiled (Ex 34:35). The Transfiguration now “completes” for Moses (and Elijah) what had begun on Mt. Sinai, since Jesus is now revealed as the fullness of God’s truth, the one about whom they wrote in the Scriptures.

it requires effort to “climb the mountain,” leave the world behind, and truly come away from our regular lives for this hour each week. But if we respond generously to this invitation of the Lord, he will bless us with the incredible privilege of knowing him more fully as the beloved eternal Son of the Father, enveloped in the blinding and overshadowing glory of the Holy Spirit.

There are two important elements from the Transfiguration, that are also echoed in every Mass. The first is the conversation which takes place between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Moses and Elijah are the central figures of the Old Testament, representing the Law and the Prophets. The Scripture readings at Mass from the Old Testament and Gospels/New Testament are not simply recitations. They are interconnected; a living conversation between Jesus the Messiah and the ancient prophets who first spoke of him. At Mass we are “privy” to some part of the intimate conversation of Jesus in which God’s eternal divine plan for man is discussed and revealed.

The second aspect of the Transfiguration echoed at the Mass is the lifting of the veil (i.e. revelation) on the divine reality. Like Christ himself, of whom they are the Sign in the Church, the Sacraments conceal divine reality in sensible form. In the Incarnation, God became Man, but the divinity remained concealed by the humanity, so that people only perceived Christ as a completely ordinary man. In the Sacrament, such as the transubstantiation which takes place in the Eucharist, bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, but the Real Presence of Jesus remains concealed by the material elements, so that people only perceive the Eucharist as ordinary bread and wine. Just as the truth of his divinity was fully and plainly revealed to the Apostles on the mountain, the reality of Christ’s divinity and resurrection is revealed to his devout followers in the Mass according to his will and their need.

Presumably, no one will have a Transfiguration experience of the degree and intensity as the one recounted in the Gospels, but we should have no doubt that every Christian who sincerely takes up his discipleship of the Lord, will experience from Christ the mystery of the Transfiguration in the Mass, to some degree, to the degree that is needed for his strengthening in faith. Each of us will have our Cross to carry, our Gethsemane to endure. Each of us will therefore also be given the Transfiguration as preparation.

During these 40 days of Lent, let us too go with the Lord to Jerusalem in the way of the Cross. But let go strengthened by the vision of Christ revealed in the Mass, a vision of resurrection to come, ancient promises fulfilled.