

Transfiguration of the Lord

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

Glory to Jesus Christ!

The Transfiguration of Christ holds a special place in the great feasts of the Church. It is a feast which brings unspeakable joy, peace, and reassurance to those who understand the deep significance of the event. In the Patristic tradition of the Church, in the writings of the Holy Fathers, the vision of Christ in glory is the goal of the spiritual life, and the one who has reached this goal is already a participant in the kingdom of God, even if he has not yet passed on to the age to come.

Christ Himself said just six days prior to His glorious Transfiguration, “Truly I say unto you, There are some standing here, who shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.”

From the Gospel accounts we know that only a handful of people – Peter, James, and John, together with Moses and Elias – were there on Mount Tabor to witness this marvelous revelation of Christ’s divinity. Yet, in these five men were represented all the righteous men and women of the Old and New Testaments.

Moses, who received the tablets of the Law from God on Mount Sinai, and the Prophet Elias, who ascended into heaven in a fiery chariot, bore witness to Christ as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. And the three disciples, Peter, James, and John became representatives of all the New Testament saints by becoming as St. Peter writes in his second epistle, “eye-witnesses to Christ’s majesty.” Together they reveal to us that Christ is not only the mediator of the Old and New Covenants but that the vision of Him in glory is at the very center of the Holy Scriptures.

Today Christ’s majesty is revealed in light – His face shone like the sun and His clothing became as white as the light. Yet, to be sure, the light which shone from Christ was not material but immaterial. It was not the light which was fashioned on the first day of Creation, when God separated the light from the darkness, but it was the uncreated light of divinity – the light of the Godhead – the light which St. John the Evangelist writes is the light of men.

This vision of the uncreated light of Christ changed the disciples forever. Christ through the transfiguration of His flesh had brought about a transfiguration of His Disciples. He had transformed them from mere believers to witnesses of His glory and participants of His kingdom. And by doing so, He has prepared them for His upcoming Passion.

The Kontakion clearly explains that Christ revealed His glory to the disciples as far as they could bear it, “so that when they would behold Him crucified, they would understand that His suffering was voluntary and would proclaim to the world that He is truly the radiance of the Father.”

What does it mean that they would understand that His suffering was voluntary? What is this connection between Christ's Transfiguration and Crucifixion.

The Gospels record that on Mount Tabor Christ spoke with Moses and Elias about His upcoming Passion. And six days before being transfigured on the mountain, Christ told His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. This was a difficult thing for the disciples to accept and to be sure their faith would have failed them in this dark hour had they not experienced the light of the transfiguration.

Often times when I ask people, what time of day they think the Transfiguration occurred, they say at night or in the early morning. Yet the Fathers tell us that the Transfiguration occurred in the middle of the day, when the sun was at its zenith, and that with the Transfiguration of Christ a sort of mystical eclipse took place – the Sun of Righteousness eclipsing the light of the earthly sun.

Now let us recall for a minute what happened when Christ ascended the mount of Golgotha and hung upon the Cross. The earth quaked and the veil of the Temple was torn in two. But was not also the sun darkened from the sixth hour to the ninth hour, from 12 noon to 3 o'clock?

For the world this was truly a dark day, yet for Peter, James, and John, the foremost of the disciples the eclipse of that terrible day jogged something unforgettable in their memories. They recalled how their Lord had just forty days previously shown with immeasurable glory, power, and light on Mount Tabor. And when they saw Him upon the Cross – they for the first time began to realize the deepest mystery of the Christian faith – they began to understand that true glory is found in self-sacrificial love.

When Judas the Iscariot took the morsel of bread and went out from the last supper to betray the Lord on the night before His Passion, the Lord said to His disciples, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." And a little later, in the Garden of Gethsemane Christ prayed to His heavenly Father, "Father, the hour has now come. Glorify Your Son so that Your Son also may glorify You. I have glorified You upon the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now Father, glorify Me with Yourself with the glory which I had with You before the world was."

How great is this mystery, the Lord refers to His Crucifixion as His hour of glory! For the Jews the Cross is a stumbling block, for the Greeks foolishness, but in the words of St. Paul, for those who are being saved it is the wisdom and power of God – it is the glory of the Church. It is for this reason, that in the icons of the Crucifixion of Christ we see inscribed not what Pilate had written, "The King of the Jews", but what the faithful know to be true, the "Lord of Glory".

Brothers and sisters, for us the Transfiguration of Christ is not only an event of the past but an invitation in the present. An invitation to a spiritual ascent and a life changing, life transfiguring, vision of God.

And so let us ascend the mountain with Peter, James, and John, leaving behind not only our sins which so easily drag us down but also our worldly mindedness, aspirations, and spiritual laziness. With the disciples let us set our minds on the things of heaven rather than the things of this world. And let us use every means which the Church provides for our ascent – prayer, fasting, almsgiving, works of mercy, charity, the attending of and participation in Church services, the reading of the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Fathers, the cleansing of our souls through repentance and confession, and the heartfelt reception of the Holy Mysteries.

For by living this life of Christian ascent, we will draw ever closer to Christ, experiencing more and more the vision of Him in glory. And like the disciples we will be changed from mere believers to sharers in His Kingdom. We will understand something of the glory of the Cross of Christ. And we will with God's help become more willing bearers of our own crosses for we will be reassured that through the sacrifices of the Christian life, through our imitation of Christ's selfless love, we will not only glorify God but we will be glorified by Him.

Let this uncreated light which shown from Christ on Tabor and Golgotha enlighten the understanding of our minds and warm our hearts and transfigure our entire being. And let us not simply cry out with the Apostle Peter, "Lord it is good for us to be here!" But let us also proclaim to the world that Christ is truly the radiance of the Father.

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