

The Second Sunday of Lent 12 March 2017

“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear him.” Mt. 17:5

In today’s Gospel (Mt. 17:1-9), we are given a glimpse of the great glory of God in heaven. While His stunned apostles, Peter, James, and John look on, the transfigured Jesus speaks of His coming passion with the Prophet Elias, and with Moses, the Father of the Law. It is truly a revelation beyond our earthly comprehension: a penetrating (or “rare”) vision of eternity. Jesus reveals the glory of His Divinity as St. John told us in the beginning of his gospel: ***“And we saw his glory—glory as of the only begotten of the Father—full of grace and truth.”*** Jn. 1:14. In today’s Epistle (I Thess: 4:1-7) St. Paul tells the Thessalonians that they must continue in a life of holiness: ***“For this is the will of God, your sanctification.”*** I Thess. 4:3 Only those who do God’s will and are holy will enjoy the glory of God in heaven. The message of the Transfiguration is that there will be no glory unless we suffer with Christ who died on Mt. Calvary.

“For God has not called you to uncleanness, but unto holiness.” I Thess. 4:7

In addressing the Thessalonians, St. Paul is aware that they have only been converted for one year, therefore he reminds them not to revert back to their pagan practices of uncleanness; ***“For this is the will of God, your sanctification that you abstain from immorality; not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God...”*** I Thess. 4:3 & 5. Only the clean of heart will see God in His glory as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: ***“Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God.”*** Mt. 5:8

Christ destroys death

Jesus has conquered death by His cross and resurrection. St. Luke alone tells us that Jesus is talking to Moses and Elias about His ***“death, which was about to be fulfilled in Jerusalem.”*** Lk. 9:31. St. Peter does not seem to understand the need for Jesus to suffer and die, and he wants to build three tents there to prolong the glory of the moment: ***“It is good for us to be here.”*** Mt. 17:4. Peter’s wish, of course, is not possible because Jesus has come to suffer and die for our sins. He is doing the Father’s will, and this is why the Father is well-pleased with

Him: ***“This is my beloved son, in whom I am well-pleased; hear him.”*** Mt. 17:5. In this scene, we have a theophany, a revelation of God as the Blessed Trinity: the Son is transfigured in glory, the Father speaks, and the Holy Spirit overshadows them in a cloud (like He overshadowed the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament). What greater confirmation could the apostles have of Jesus’ mission? Pope St. Leo the Great comments on Jesus’ divinity overshadowing Elias and Moses: ***“He is the one who teaches the truth of prophecy (Elias) through His presence, and makes the obedience to the Commandments (Moses) possible through grace.”*** Pope St. Leo also tells us that Jesus reveals Himself to the Apostles to remove from them the shame and humiliation of the cross which He had revealed to them several days previously when He told them that He would suffer and die and rise from the dead: ***“...the primary purpose of this transfiguration was to remove the scandal of the cross from the hearts of Christ’s disciples; the greatness of His glory was revealed to them to prevent their faith from being shaken by the self-abasement of the suffering He was voluntarily to undergo.”*** By showing the apostles His transfigured Body, Jesus would sustain them for His future suffering and death.

The Glory of Jesus’ Human Nature

Dom Gueranger in his book, *The Liturgical Life, Vol. 5* comments on the dramatic action of the Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor: ***“He (Jesus) therefore leaves the rest of the disciples in the plain near Nazareth, and goes in company with the three privileged ones towards a high hill called Tabor.... No sooner has He reached the summit of the mountain, than the three apostles observe a sudden change come over Him; His Face shines as the sun, and His humble garments become white as snow. They observe two venerable men approach and speak with Him upon what He is about to suffer in Jerusalem. One is Moses, the lawgiver; the other is Elias, the prophet, who was taken up from the earth on a fiery chariot without having passed through the gates of death. These two great representatives of the Jewish religion, the Law and the Prophets, humbly adore Jesus of Nazareth. The three apostles are not only dazzled by the brightness which comes from their divine Master; but they are filled with such a rapture of delight, that they cannot bear the thought of leaving the***

place. Peter proposes to remain there forever and build three tabernacles, for Jesus, Moses and Elias. And while they are admiring the glorious sight, and gazing on the beauty of their Jesus' human Nature, a bright cloud overshadows them, and a voice is heard speaking to them: it is the voice of the eternal Father, proclaiming the Divinity of Jesus, and saying: **'This is My beloved Son!'**

"This transfiguration of the Son of Man, this manifestation of His glory, lasted but a few moments: His mission was not on Thabor; it was humiliation and suffering in Jerusalem." Gueranger, p. 187-9

Suffer for Christ

Like Jesus, we also have to carry our cross in this life. Rather than remain joyful and glorious on Mt. Thabor as the three apostles had desired, we have to suffer with Jesus on Mt. Calvary. St. Paul tells of Jesus' great joy in carrying His cross: **"...Jesus, who for joy set before him, endured a cross, despising shame."** Heb. 12:2 For Jesus, the cross is not shameful or scandalous. It is His glory for He obeys His Father and shows His great love for us. He could have redeemed us with a prayer, a sigh, a tear, a word..., but He preferred to suffer an ignominious death on the cross: **"Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends."** Jn. 15:13. This is why St Teresa loved the picture of the suffering and thorned-crown Christ. This is why she said: **"Lord, let me suffer or die."** St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi said, **"Lord, don't let me die, but suffer!"** St. John of the Cross wanted the favour of suffering and being despised for Christ: **"I wish to suffer and be despised for you!"** Cardinal Mercier, in the early part of the 20th century, refused a needle to ease his pain: **"No, I will never allow this, because our Lord did not have that when He was in His agonizing pain."** This is the language of the saints.

Hope for heaven

St. Bede, the great English monk, in commenting on this passage of the Gospel tells us that Our Lord **"in a loving concession allowed Peter, James and John to enjoy for a very short time the contemplation of the happiness that lasts forever, so as to enable them to bear adversity with greater fortitude."** *Commentary on St. Mark*, 8:30; Mk 1:3). St. John Chrysostom tells us that we, in time of temptation and difficulty, should think of our heavenly glory: **"(There), all is repose, joy and delight; all serenity and calm, all**

peace, splendour and light. It is not a light such as we enjoy now, and which, compared to that is no more than a lamp placed beside the sun...For there, there is no night, or twilight, heat or cold, or any change in one's being, but a state such as can be understood only by those who are worthy to possess it. There, there is no old age, or sickness, or anything allied to corruption, because it is the place and the home of immortal glory.

And above all this the everlasting presence and possession of Christ, of the angels...everyone perpetually of like mind, without any fear of Satan or the snares of the devil or the threats of hell or death." (*Epistle to Theodore*, 11)

"...regaining lost joy..."

If we want to regain some of the lost joy that we should have in this world when we think of our heavenly home then we need to make a good confession of our sins. Pope John Paul in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Reconciliation and Penance*, (2 December, 1984, 31, III) tells us that every contrite confession is **"a drawing near to the holiness of God, a rediscovery of one's true identity, which has been upset and disturbed by sin, a liberation in the very depths of one's self and thus a regaining of lost joy, the joy of being saved, which the majority of people in our time are no longer capable of experiencing."**

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard nor has it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for those who love him."

I Cor. 2:9.

We should always think about our eternal destiny. Nothing is as important as gaining heaven. St. Teresa tells us that we should be determined to endure all in order to gain heaven: **"...and bearing in mind this determination to die rather than to fail to reach the end of the way; if God ever causes you to suffer from thirst as he guides you through life, it is because he will give you drink in plenty in the next life, without any fear of it ever failing you."** (*The Way of Perfection*, 20, 2) The glory of the Transfiguration is a foreshadowing of our eternal destiny in heaven. Never forget these memorable words of St. Paul: **"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard nor has it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for those who love him."** I Cor. 2:9. The message of the Transfiguration is that Heaven

is our final destiny and our true home; let us sacrifice everything in this life to gain such a glorious eternity.

Addenda

St. Maximilian Kolbe on Our Lady

"By a special divine grace only Mary, the Mother of God, from the first moment of Her existence, avoided original sin and for this reason became the worthy Mother of the Man-God, who is unlimited purity and infinite sanctity." (SK #1203)

"Whoever does not want to have Mary Immaculate for Mother will neither have Christ the Lord for brother, God the Father will not send him the Son, the Son will not descend in his soul, the Holy Spirit will not form by His graces the mystical body according to the pattern of Christ, because all of this takes place in Mary Immaculate, full of grace, and only in Her." (SK #1295)

"I adore you, O our Heavenly Father, because you placed in the most pure womb of Mary your only begotten Son. I adore you, O Son of God, because you condescended to enter Her womb and you became truly, really, Her Son. I adore you, o Holy Spirit, because you deigned to form in Her immaculate womb the body of the Son of God. I adore you, O Most Holy Trinity, one God in the Holy Trinity, for having ennobled the Immaculate in such a divine way." (SK #1305)

"Who are you, O Lady? Who are you, O Immaculate?...You are not just a creature, you are not just an adoptive daughter, but you are the Mother of God and not just an adoptive mother, but the true Mother of God." (SK #1305)

"For all eternity, O Immaculate, God will call you 'My Mother'...He who established the fourth commandment will honour you for all eternity, always...Who are you, O Divine Lady? He Himself, God Incarnate, loved to call Himself, 'the Son of Man'. But men did not understand Him. And today as well, how few are those souls who understand Him, and still how imperfectly they understand Him." (SK #1305)