

Our Lenten Journey 2



The Transfiguration by Titian

Why do we have the Gospel of the Transfiguration on this Sunday?

Last Sunday our Lenten journey started with the Temptation of Christ in the desert to signal that now we undergo forty days of trial, preparing to celebrate the Paschal mysteries with our hearts and minds renewed. But the journey is a difficult one and therefore, we need some encouragement. Thus, the Church in her wisdom shows us what the goal is: to be transfigured, glorified in heaven with Christ. The Transfiguration is therefore a message of hope. It is the goal. As St. Paul says the trials we suffer now are nothing in comparison with the glory that will be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18)

Why does Matthew start off the narrative with the phrase “after six days?”

Whenever the Gospels use time in this way something important is happening. For example, In St. John’s gospel Chapter 1 we have a series of “on the next day” culminating in Chapter 2 with the phrase “on the third day.” Why? Because Cana happens on the seventh day – the day of rest and the marriage of creation in the O.T. but now the marriage of the new creation in the N.T.. The transfiguration happens after six days because Matthew is drawing out attention to the fact that Peter had affirmed six days previously that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God; but our Lord had warned that he would have to suffer and Peter tried to stop him. Thus, Matthew is affirming that Glory and Suffering are inextricably linked. To attain the Glory we must follow the way of Our Lord’s passion which is his glory as John tells us (12:27ff) where incidentally we also have the Father speaking from heaven.

Why does Jesus go up a high mountain?

The symbolism here is important. When we ascend a mountain we are leaving the every day life behind, we are separating ourselves and becoming closer to God(notice that Luke tells us that Jesus ascended the mountain “to pray.”(Lk 9:28) It is a place where we climb internally not just externally as Lent is a hidden journey within. (incidentally the temptation of Jesus took place on a mountain.) Lastly, we can survey the land, we can as it were take stock of our ordinary lives below.

Why do Moses and Elijah appear and about what were they talking?

Moses represents the Law and Elijah represents the prophets; they both bore witness to the One who was to come. Both ascended Mount Sinai, both fasted for forty days and both had the glory of God revealed to them, Moses also took three companions up the mountain and his face shone so brightly that he had to cover it with a veil. St. Matthew does not tell us about the conversation; however, Luke does(Lk 9:28): “ They spoke of his departure that he would

bring about in Jerusalem.” The key is that departure should be translated Exodus. They were therefore talking about his passion and his going out of this world to the Father. The exodus of the chosen people from Egypt was a type of the new exodus. This is important Jesus comes to initiate the new exodus from sin to friendship with the Father. Incidentally we know from the Book of Revelation that Jerusalem was the new Egypt, just as corrupt and Jesus was to leave it and bring about the new covenant for all peoples. (Revelation 11.8)

The transfiguration of Jesus

We should remember that the transfiguration is to encourage us against the scandal of the cross but the miracle is not that Jesus was transfigured but rather he chose to let his light shine forth, this is how he would always have looked to men had he not chose to cover up his glory – a profound lesson in humility. We also see the difference between Moses and Jesus. Moses reflects in his face the glory that shone upon him from God; Christ’s glory and light come from within him for he is not only man but God. The white garment is the garment of angels and the elect.

Why does Peter ask to build three shelters(tents)?

Is it simply that Peter does not want to leave this ecstasy? Possibly but as Pope Benedict points out the Transfiguration is bound closely with the Jewish festival of Tabernacles – it most probably took place during the festival - where they would leave their houses and dwell in make shift shelters to remind themselves of the time of wandering in the wilderness. Now this festival not only reminded them of God’s providence in history but also pointed forward to a time of the eternal rest (end of time). Thus, Peter thought perhaps at first that the end time had come. But he was not totally wrong. Why? If we go to the end of the previous chapter Our Lord had told his disciples that some would not taste death before they had seen the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. Surely, this is the transfiguration, a visible

sign that God's kingdom is among us already but which will achieve its perfection at the end of time.

The important message of the Transfiguration

Matthew reports several key passages: God the Father tells us that we must listen to his son in whom he is well pleased. Just as Our Lady told us at Cana to do whatever he tells you. When the mystery is over they saw only Jesus. We too must only see Jesus – we must keep our eyes fixed upon him and do whatever he tells us.

- Have we set some time aside this Lent to go up the mountain with Jesus?
- Have we taken some more time to pray, to be closer to God?
- Have we taken stock of where we are at? What do we need to change?
- Have we meditated on the great glory that awaits us, if we just do what Jesus us tells us, a glory so great that nothing should stop us seeking it?

Have we considered that we too have been looked upon with favour by our heavenly Father who has transformed us in Baptism, feeds us with the Eucharist and forgives our sins in Confession?

God looks upon us with favour when He sees in us His son.

Some interesting Scripture passages to read in this context:

Very important: Second Letter of Saint Peter (1:16) where he looks back at the event – it clearly made an impression! St. Paul 2nd Letter to the Corinthians (3:12 to 4:7) and to the Romans (8:18 and chapter 8 in general).

God bless and may He speed us on our way to Glory, Fr Dominic