

The Feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord

Luke 9: 28-36

Daniel 7:9-10,13-14; 2 Peter 1:16-19

People often come out with some of the oddest things, even in a court of law. Take this dialogue, for instance:

Lawyer: "How old is your son, the one living with you?";

Witness: "Thirty-eight or thirty-five, I can't remember

which."; Lawyer: "How long has he lived with you?"; Witness:

"Forty-five years."

Or how about this one:

Lawyer: "Now sir, I'm sure you are an intelligent and honest

man--"; Witness: "Thank you. If I weren't under oath, I'd

return the compliment."

And then there's this classic:

Lawyer: "What is your date of birth?"; Witness: "July 15th."

Lawyer: "What year?"; Witness: "Every year."

People do indeed say the funniest things, especially when they're under pressure.

And *here*, in the midst of this awesome and mysterious event which we call the Transfiguration, we find the apostle Peter coming out with the

strangest of comments - "Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah - *not* knowing what he said.'" Peter was so overawed by what he was experiencing that he simply didn't know how to respond. He really couldn't grasp what this was all about, and so in the heat of the moment, he simply comes out with this comment about putting up some tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. If *we* put *ourselves* in Peter's place, though, we probably would not have reacted much differently. Because what Peter witnessed on that holy mountain was something which is truly beyond our everyday experience.

Now in order to grasp the real significance of the Transfiguration we have to look at this event in the wider context of chapter 9 of Luke's Gospel. Because underlying this whole section of the Gospel is the basic question, 'Who exactly is this Jesus of Nazareth?' And it all climaxes in the question Jesus puts to the disciples themselves, "...who do *you* say that I am?", to which Peter responds with that great

declaration, “The Messiah/the Christ of God.” It’s that crucial moment in the Gospel narrative where the real truth about who Jesus is, is revealed to his disciples. And soon after this key declaration, we get this extraordinary event of the Transfiguration. Because the Transfiguration is the ultimate statement on the matter. Here the declaration of Christ’s true identity is made by God the Father himself - “...from the cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’” At Christ’s baptism in the river Jordan, at the very beginning of his ministry, God had declared Jesus to be the Messiah in a similar manner, and now this truth is underlined here once again.

So, first and foremost, the Transfiguration speaks to us definitively of the real identity of Jesus. The cloud, the voice from heaven and the glorious change in Christ’s appearance, all testify to who he *is*. So, we read of Peter, James and John seeing Christ’s *glory*. Back in the Old Testament, glory is a characteristic of God himself, and now this *glory* is seen in his Son Jesus Christ. Christ shares the nature of God the

Father - he is not just another man, but truly God made man. The glory of Jesus which the three apostles witnessed at his Transfiguration is the same glory which John speaks of in the well-known words from the prologue to his Gospel - “We have *seen* his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Then there’s the cloud. In the Old Testament, the cloud is a visible sign of the presence of God. And so *here* again, the cloud is a visible sign of God’s presence on the holy mountain, and from that cloud breaks through the divine voice, testifying to the divinity of Jesus Christ - “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him!” The extraordinary event of the Transfiguration shows us that the key claim of the Christian faith - that Jesus is fully God and fully man - is not based on mere intellectual speculation, or the flights of fancy of theologians. Rather it’s a truth which is grounded in reality - in experience. In fact, in our reading from the Second Letter of Peter, the apostle makes direct reference to the Transfiguration event, as he declares, “...we did *not* follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming

of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been *eyewitnesses* of his majesty...We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain." The truth that Jesus is Lord is not based on fairy tales, but rather upon what the apostles had actually witnessed; it is God the Father himself who has revealed it. Jesus does indeed fulfil the prophetic vision of Daniel, from centuries earlier, of the "one like a human being / one like a son of man" to whom is "given dominion and glory and kingship....."

Then secondly, in the Transfiguration, God the Father assures his Son of the necessity of the Cross. When we look back again at the text immediately preceding the account of this event, we find that following Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah of God, Jesus himself goes on to describe what being the Messiah was to *mean* for him - he says, "'The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.'" His suffering and death on the Cross were to

be the climax of his ministry. And when he goes up on the mountain to pray, he was probably pondering the magnitude of the suffering which he was to undergo - was this really the path he was to follow - was this the way he was meant to go? And in the Transfiguration, God the Father provides his Son with that affirmation that yes, this is indeed the path he must follow. So, when Moses and Elijah appear in glory and talk with Jesus, Luke notes that they "were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." In *their* time, both Moses and Elijah - the great figures of the Old Testament - had been trying to lead the people of Israel to righteousness. But now, Christ, through his death on the Cross would accomplish for *all* people (and not just for the people of Israel) what Moses and Elijah could not. Christ's coming death would have not just national, but *universal* significance. And so, Christ would be glorified only after he had experienced suffering, though in the Transfiguration we catch a brief glimpse of that glory.

And in the same way, if we are sincerely wanting to

follow the way of the Lord, then *we* too have to take up *our* cross daily and follow him. The Christian faith is not about escaping from the difficult realities of life, but rather about walking closely with Jesus through all the ups and downs we face; it's about walking in the way of the Cross. Of course, this is *not* a particularly attractive proposition. In fact, Peter's strange comment about making three dwellings for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, probably reflected the fact that he really wanted this moment up on the mountain to last as long as possible. He wanted to hold onto this 'nice' moment in which the eternal glory of Jesus is momentarily revealed - for him, it was so much more desirable to the idea of Jesus suffering on the Cross. But that moment was *not* to last forever; they had to eventually come down from that mountain-top experience and journey with Christ to Jerusalem where he would suffer and die. The Christian life is certainly *not* one long series of 'nice' moments. If we sincerely want to follow the Lord, then we too have to go through many trials in life in order to win the crown - it's not about instant glory.

And finally, reflecting upon the Transfiguration causes us to consider to what extent Christ's *glory* is reflected in *our* lives. *If* we have encountered God through his Son, is the radiance of Christ's glory truly reflected in *our* lives? Having met with the Lord in worship, do we then leave this place changed, transformed, transfigured even, so that others may see Christ's glory reflected in and through *us*? Because as the apostle Paul reminds us in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, if we have truly encountered the Lord, then we "are being *transformed* into the same image from one degree of glory to another."

So, the apostle Peter at first failed to understand the real significance of the Transfiguration, but after his Master's death, resurrection and ascension, it would all eventually become clear to him. Because the Transfiguration speaks to us of the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is uniquely God's Son; the only appropriate response is to listen to *him*. It reminds us of the necessity of the Cross and our need, in turn, to take

up *our* cross daily and follow the Lord. And the Transfiguration reminds us that it ought to be our desire for Christ's glory to be displayed in and through *our* lives as we go about our business each day, so that others may turn to the Lord Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

As the late Archbishop Michael Ramsay, once reflected, the Transfiguration is an event which brings all things together – the living and the dead, the old and the new, suffering and glory, the age to come and the present, the human and the divine.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, as we give thanks today for the Transfiguration in which you revealed the glory of your Son to chosen witnesses; help us, we pray, to catch those glimpses of your glory as we go about our daily lives with all its 'ups & downs'. And, in turn, may the radiance of Christ's glory be reflected in and through our lives.

'As we gaze on your kingly brightness.

So our faces display your likeness.

Ever changing from glory to glory,

Mirrored here may our lives tell *your* story.'

In Jesus' name. Amen.