

Sermon for the Feast of the Transfiguration, 6 August 2023

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The transfiguration of Christ was to a considerable extent for the benefit of the three disciples... Peter, John, and James. They needed confirmation of Christ's glory, even though they had seen numerous signs of his glory throughout his public ministry.

Children need confirmation of the love of a father or mother towards them every now and again, even though they know that that love is always there for them. But if a child is going through a difficult time or about to face a difficult time, then a greater confirmation of love may be needed.

The three disciples needed to experience the confirmation of God's dazzling goodness and glory - not because of lack of faith, but to strengthen them for the trials ahead. It was the divine wisdom of Christ that only three of the disciples were given this greater privilege. Possibly because Christ knew that these three - Peter, John and James would be more receptive and attentive to Christ's glory and because they could be relied upon to proclaim the glory of the Messiah in due course.

These three most faithful of disciples knew in their hearts that tough times lay ahead of them. And on the mount of Tabor the three saw and experienced as much as they could bear of the shining glory of Christ.

This experience, even though it was almost too much to bear would fortify them in the momentous days that lay ahead - days in which they would witness the Lord's death and glory.

The Transfiguration foreshadowed the Lord's death and glory. The brilliant radiance of the transfiguration illuminated Jesus' divine identity and divine mission as never before.

In that moment of transfiguration – when they witnessed the dazzling glory and tangible presence of the Divine - they were left stunned and speechless - that is except for Peter who was never speechless. Though in the shock at seeing the full majesty of Christ he became befuddled in his speech.

In their amazement at the transfiguration of Christ - little did they realize that this manifestation of Christ's glory gave them a preview not only of the glory of eternity beyond time and space, or the glory of Christ's divine nature - the glory of his light inaccessible which is usually hid from our eyes... But they were given a preview of His greatest glory, hidden in the humiliation of the Cross.

And that very humiliation was his route of departure from this world to glory - that Moses and Elijah conversed with Jesus about.

How I wish the author of this passage on the transfiguration had given us something of the actual content of that conversation concerning Jesus's departure. But what greater glory can there be than the glory of the incarnate word pouring out his blood, for the life of the world. What greater glory can there be than the glory of the sacred heart of Christ overflowing with love on the Cross.

In the second part of my address this morning I want to note that the experience of the Transfiguration gave the three disciples a godly humility.

The disciples had been in the Lord's presence for quite a long time. They had seen great deeds and miracles... But were they I wonder becoming over familiar with Christ and what he was doing?

The old saying 'familiarity breeds contempt' is so often true. This seemed to be the case for Peter. His prolonged contact with Jesus eroded his sense of awe and wonder. When the glory of Jesus was manifested to him on the mount of transfiguration, there could be no more rudeness such as he displayed when our Lord first spoke of His pending death. His obligation was to fall in adoration and wonder before his Lord and Master and listen to His every word.

Do we listen to his every word? Or do we listen to him from merely a human perspective?

I believe a correct estimation of Jesus is vital.

Have we beheld Jesus as our only hope in a world that chases false empty dreams. The self-serving dreams of the world are void of spiritual power because they are man-made. They are not the God made dream - they are not the vision that God offers us in Christ - Who is the radiance of God's glory.

The story is told of Thomas Carlyle the 19th century Scottish philosopher who, at the time of his imminent death, was read the words of Christian comfort from the opening verses of the 14th chapter of the gospel according to St John: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions."

He interrupted the reader saying: "Aye, if you were God, you had a right to say that; but if you were only a man, what do you know any more than the rest of us?"

You see, our estimate of Jesus makes all the difference in the world.

For those of us who have come to faith in Him, we must forever heed the words of the Father concerning his beloved Son: "Listen to Him."

Who today are listening? Who today are heeding His word?

Often, we do everything but listen. We hear what we want to hear. But if we are to truly listen or understand then our hearts must be turned towards Him. Our hearts must be emptied of self, our hearts must be emptied of pride. If our hearts are not emptied of self and emptied of pride and emptied of our self-absorbed thoughts, then no matter how much we imagine we listen – we don't really listen.

Only when our hearts are emptied in a radical and deep way will his word truly touch us and transfigure our hearts.

We need to be transfigured if we are to be his disciples. We need to be renewed and transfigured in our souls if we are to have the strength to carry even the light yoke that Christ lays upon us.

May our hearts be so transfigured and filled with the radiance of Christ that we joyfully carry the yoke he lays upon us, and reflect his life in word and deed, even to the hour of our final departure - that all the world may know his power to transform and save. Amen