

## **The Transfiguration of Our Lord, A ✕ D 2011**

### **Matthew 17:1-9**

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

1        Wouldn't that be nice. Just to get a glimpse of God in His glory would confirm everything we believe by faith but not by sight. Just a moment of seeing Christ displayed in the full, blazing glory of God would be enough to carry us through our mundane everyday. Then you could confess with St. Peter, "We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,' we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we ourselves were with Him on the mountain." Now that would be something.

2        Or if you had been there with Moses when God wrought acts of mighty deliverance against the Egyptians in order to bring His people out of slavery, that would have been a great boon to your faith. If you could have seen the deliverance through the Red Sea, camped at the base of Mt. Sinai while peals of thunder and flashes of lightning reminded you Whom Moses went to visit, or even wandered in the wilderness where manna miraculously appeared every morning and cool, fresh water flowed from a rock at Rephaim, then you could really know that all this God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob business was true. Or if you had been there with Elijah atop Mt. Carmel, to watch the 450 prophets of Baal dance around, cut themselves, and cry out for Baal to answer them, to no avail, if you had heard Elijah's prayer for fire to come down from heaven and consume water-drenched sacrifice, if you had seen the fire blast down, burning the sacrifice, the wood, the altar, then the water in the trenches, yes, that would have been something. Maybe then, you could talk yourself into believing the stories were really true.

3        After six days, six days from the time of Peter's bold confession, from the time of Peter's "Lord, there's no way you can die on the cross," from the time of Jesus' "Get behind me, Satan" to Peter, Jesus took with Him Peter, James, and John up Mt. Tabor. There, He was transfigured, displaying His blazing, brilliant glory, appearing with Moses and Elijah, to confirm that He is the Christ, having the Voice of God the Father testify, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him." But here you are, six days later, on the seventh day since your last encounter with the Lord, and the displays of glory pale in comparison to what Peter, James, and John beheld, to what God's Old Testament people observed, and to what the first generation of the New Testament Church was privy to. Sometimes, it would be nice to have just a glimpse of God's glory, just an occasional peek behind the veil to have strength to endure gloryless days. That would be something.

4        If it were necessary for you to see the Transfigured Christ, you would. But it's not. The account of the Transfiguration is recorded for your benefit, but the event of the Transfiguration is not. This dazzling display of the divinity of Jesus is specifically for these disciples whom Jesus took with Him atop Mt. Tabor: Peter, James, and John. This first-hand vision of the glory of God is for the benefit of these apostles who are about to descend from the mountain. From here,

they will descend to the plain and make their way toward a different mountain, Mt. Calvary. This glorious vision is to sustain these men through the Crucifixion, giving them the confidence that the One who will hang on the cross and die is the Divine Son of God, whose glory they had seen. And even though He will die, He gives them the promise that the Son of Man will rise from the dead.

5 At the end of the service, with the 11<sup>th</sup> century hymn “Alleluia, Song of Gladness,” we will observe the Church’s ancient practice of burying the “alleluia” throughout Lent. So we will sing, “But by Babylon’s sad waters Mourning exiles now are we. Alleluia cannot always Be our song while here below; Alleluia, our transgressions Make us for a while forego; For the solemn time is coming When our tears for sin must flow. Therefore in our hymns we pray Thee, Grant us, blessed Trinity, At the last to keep Thine Easter With Thy faithful saints on high; There to Thee forever singing Alleluia joyfully.”

6 These disciples are preparing for the cross. You have been prepared by the cross. They needed to behold the glory of Christ; you do not. On the cross, Jesus bore every sin of mankind. Every faltering faith, every time you like the Apostles have doubt, every moment of frustration wherein you wish that God would just make having faith a little bit easier, every time you have questioned His goodness toward you, every time you like the journeying Israelites complain, every time you have forgotten that He has delivered you through the sea of Baptism, every time you wish for glory more than forgiveness, every time you are wont to believe your eyes and not your ears, every sin has been borne by Christ on His cross. The display of Jesus’ glory atop Mt. Tabor was to demonstrate His power over sin when nailed to the cross atop Mt. Calvary. He is God, in all His blazing white light. And He deigns to die for you. The cross thus prepares you for these gloryless days in ways the Transfiguration never could.

7 Having been prepared by the cross, having sins taken away in Holy Baptism, we do not need Christ in glory. Knowing that He who died is He who rose, there is no greater display of His divinity than that He died for His creation and rose victorious from the grave. Since Christ has revealed His glory in suffering on the cross, since He has displayed His divinity in His resurrection, you are not awaiting another Transfiguration, a momentary glimpse of the glory of God to sustain you from day to day. You, having been united into His death and resurrection in the waters of Holy Baptism, are awaiting the display of your glory, the day of your resurrection, when you will be transfigured, transformed from your bodies of sin and corruption into bodies incorruptible and brilliant, reflecting the very light of the glory of Christ, on the Day of His return.

8 Until then, even when the days seem gloryless, even when we must for a while forego our joyful alleluias, we are not left without Christ. A God displayed in glory cannot be approached or touched by sinners. Moses could only see the backside of God; Isaiah only saw the hem of His robe filling the temple. But a Christ who veils His glory for a moment, a Christ who comes not in brilliant light but in humble bread and wine, is a Christ who can be approached and touched. A Christ who hides His glory in humble means is a Christ who can be eaten, a forgiveness that can be tasted.

9        At no time are you closer to Paradise than in Holy Communion. Here, you receive Christ Himself. Not mere bread and wine, not symbols of an absent Christ, but the real Body and real Blood of Him who promised, "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life." Here the angels sing their ceaseless Sanctus. Here the departed saints in Christ gather singing an Alleluia which knows no end. How good, Lord, to be here. Here, at His altar, Christ feeds you with Himself and sends you forth into the world, back to your vocations, back to lives and days which seem mundane and gloryless. Fed and nourished with the Body and Blood of Jesus who was transfigured, your ordinary vocations are transformed. You are free to live lives of fervent love toward one another, free to endure days on the plain, days at the foot of the cross, days awaiting the Resurrection. Here, you are always refreshed, always renewed, always forgiven, always strengthened to believe what your eyes cannot see, always enabled to endure a glory hidden in a cross, water, words, bread, wine, suffering, and persecution. That is something. That is Christ, given for you.

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