

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Second Sunday of Lent
February 21, 2016

+

Every few years I dust off the story of the man who went out for his daily exercise run before dinner. It was winter and his snow-covered path was in the woods. Suddenly deer appeared all around him, running alongside him. Together with them he jumped fallen tree limbs and swerved around bushes. For a magnificent while the human runner kept up with these splendid animals. He was one with them. But he finally fell down and was cut and bruised. Returning home his wife saw the cuts and scrapes and thought he had been hit by a car. But sitting breathlessly on a kitchen chair he told her he was all right and that *he had just had the most exhilarating experience of his life*. But the man was at a loss for words. **You had to be there.**

What Peter, James, and John experienced at the Transfiguration must have been like that, *only greater*. They hadn't been running with deer! They had seen a glimpse of the glory of God. All the Hebrew prophets and sages believed no one could see God's glory and live.

If at first it seems strange such a wonderful incident is included among our gospels for Lent, further study yields the reason. Just prior to the Transfiguration the ministry of God Incarnate reached a turning point. On behalf of the apostolic band Peter declared faith in their friend and leader. Peter called Jesus "the Christ of God." Minutes later the elation and joy turned into horror. Jesus said, "The Son of Man must suffer...and be killed, and the third day be raised up." The disciples heard the *first* part of that prediction but not the *second* part. They didn't hear anything about glory. They only heard the terrible prediction of the passion and death of Jesus, (a death in which they would be complicit.) The strain and shock was so great the Lord determined right then and there to give His friends a glimpse of the glory.

Glory is an *attribute of God*. It is inseparable from Him. It surrounds Him and makes His Presence known to those who have been in it. I say "in it" because throughout history many holy men and women have sensed the numinous and supernatural as an almost tangible cloud (and sweetness) of Almighty God. God's glory is the game-changer! When experienced, everything else (all life and death itself) is put in a new light.

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Second Sunday of Lent
February 21, 2016

+

Many people today discount the incident of the Transfiguration. Peter, James, and John admitted to being in a spiritual ecstasy or trance akin to being heavy with sleep. They said things without knowing if their words made sense. Just think of what a cross-examiner could do to these men in a modern court of law! But the remembrance of the special circumstances, conditions, and reactions at the Transfiguration do not invalidate what the apostles witnessed. Rather, the difficulty in describing the event can mean it was not less real but *more real*. On a mundane level that was what the jogger felt running with the deer. **You had to be there.** Or the difference between a postcard scene of Lisbon and your being in Lisbon itself. Both are real. But the postcard, like the description of the Transfiguration, is inadequate. **You had to be there.**

Supernatural does that. Both nature and super nature are the creation of Almighty God. The Lord Who created both sun and snow has no problem attending the Second Person of the Holy Trinity with the brightness and whiteness of sun and snow. So Jesus lifted a corner of the veil that separates the natural plane which shields us from God and gave Peter, James, and John a glimpse of glory. They would never be able to describe the experience in a way that would satisfy them or us. For how can you describe a sight the effect of which is a combination of terror and sheer joy?

One thing the Transfiguration did was produce the Bible's greatest understatement! Peter exclaimed "It is good for us to be here." But the crucial message needed and given was that Our Blessed Lord, discussing His Passion with Moses and Elijah, was setting the seal of divine approval on what would happen in Jerusalem. This is why we would for evermore call those events not a tragedy but *Holy Week*.

The invitation to walk closer with the Lord Jesus can come at any moment. It can be as unexpected and unplanned as the appearance of deer in the woods. It will bring to an ordinary moment an extraordinary experience and put you at a loss for words. The wonder of God's love can suddenly penetrate our hearts, and we recognize Christ not as in a postcard scene but as the Real Presence. Later, when with Peter and the others we suffer in our struggles, we will look back on the glory

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Second Sunday of Lent
February 21, 2016

+

that has been revealed and find the assurance and comfort we need for the days to come.