

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Second Sunday of Lent
March 12, 2017

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An old saying goes like this. “Divine knowledge is kept a secret for the protection of the ignorant.” That means knowledge can actually do us harm if we are not able to integrate and properly utilize it. Sometimes things need to be held back. Sometimes people aren’t ready. We seem much evidence of this is in the Gospels. Scholars refer to the *messianic secret* of Jesus in Saint Mark’s Gospel. In the Fourth Gospel Our Lord often says “*my hour has not yet come.*” In other words, Jesus had to hide a lot. This hiding was not along the lines of a game of hide and seek! The Lord held back a full revelation of His Godhead because it would have interrupted the groundwork of faith and humility Almighty God was preparing for us.

At the Transfiguration things changed, for a moment. The Lord Jesus allowed Peter, James, and John to see His “non-physical dimension.” What was revealed on Mt Tabor was a verification of the Lord’s divinity. In this way the Transfiguration was similar to the Lord’s Baptism in the Jordan. The difference was that at the Baptism the various accounts are not clear there was a *human* audience to hear the voice and see the dove. At the Transfiguration, by all accounts, Peter, James, and John were eyewitnesses.

There was once an occasion when the Lord said to Philip “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” At the Transfiguration the disciples were experiencing this truth. And the truth was communicated in three ways. First, Moses and Elijah, representing the law and the prophets, attended Jesus. Second, the voice out of the cloud called Jesus “*Son*” and said, “*Listen to Him.*” What about the third way declaring the Lord’s divinity? It was more subtle. It is declared in the *absence* of Abraham. The father of the Hebrew people was considered the most favored of God. Now however “*a greater than Abraham is here.*” God’s Own Son is the most favored. Abraham is witness by his absence. In these ways the Transfiguration contains some of the most important Scriptural information souls can come to grasp that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

And yet the Transfiguration is so far removed from our own *experience* of God. For most of us, most of the time, the Almighty is not transfigured in a blaze of glory. He is a hidden God. He is hidden not because Christ did it once and no

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longer has the power to transfigure again! Nor is it necessary to conclude we are not ready to receive such a vision (although we suspect that is true. We appropriate the words of the centurion, “*Non sum dignus.*” At every Mass we say “Lord I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof, but speak the word only and my soul shall be healed.”)

Almighty God hides Himself in creation. He hides Himself in His government of the world. He hides Himself in His saints. He hides Himself in the Sacraments of His Church. Christ hides Himself there, placing Himself in the priest’s hands and then in *your* hands. And none of knows who is nourished and who is not, who accepts this heavenly food with a humble and contrite heart, and who is dried up because unrepentant of his own sins. The hidden God places Himself in the hands of friends and enemies alike, in His Passion, and in every day we live.

God does not hide to make life difficult but that we might have faith, which is the hope of things unseen and longed for in a life where trials and temptations are all very much seen. Christ hides so that our faith might respond to His example of selflessness and our souls may be trained for something different from anything the world sees and often applauds. *The Epistle to the Hebrews* refers to this hiding. “Christ did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but made Himself of no reputation.” And Saint Paul, speaking of the disciple’s aspiring to follow the example of Christ, says “You are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Beneath all the daily press and mess of life another foundation is being formed for our lives as we orient them to God. “I live”, says St Paul, “and yet not I but Christ lives in me.” That describes a Christian disciple winning the battle against self-centeredness as Christ gains mastery in the soul.

God hides so that all these things can happen. He *knows* souls for He is our creator. The Transfiguration was and is a marvelous thing. It helped prepare the original disciples for the coming of the Lord’s Passion. But one of the other marvels of the Transfiguration is our wondering how much is being done for us as Almighty God benevolently *withholds His glory*. And He does that so we might profitably aspire to and attain the fullness of the life He has promised us