

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Feast of the
Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus Christ
August 6, 2019

+

The incarnate ministry of God has reached a turning point just prior to the Transfiguration. On behalf of the apostolic band, Peter had declared faith in their friend and leader Jesus, calling Him “The Christ of God.” The apostles had come to believe this good friend was not just a faithful (and the most gifted) of the sons of God. He *was* and *is The Son of God*, God’s Own Son, somehow One with the God of Heaven.

That interchange is familiar to all of us. But minutes later the elation felt by the apostles had turned into horror. Jesus said, “The Son of Man must suffer and be killed, and the third day be raised up.” The apostles heard the *first* part of that prediction, *but not the second part*. The second part was about the Resurrection. Jesus was predicting beyond the Cross there would be an empty tomb, meetings in an upper room, a lakeside breakfast, the hill of the Ascension, and a final vindication of Christ and His return in glory.

All of us know the gospel proclamation. But it is important to remember the apostles did not! They didn’t have the gospel and they didn’t hear anything about glory. They only heard a terrible prediction of the passion and death of their great friend (and in whose death they would all be complicit). So great was their distress at the prediction of the passion, Jesus determined to give His friends a glimpse of the *glory*.

So, let’s think about glory. *Glory* is an attribute of God. It is inseparable from Him. It surrounds Him and makes His presence known to those who are in it. The Old Testament speaks of the *shekinah*, the cloud of God’s glory. And throughout history men and women have sensed the numinous and supernatural as the Presence, almost *the tangible odor*, of Almighty God. When people have had that experience it casts everything else, all life, and death itself, in a new light.

Modern people often discount the incident of the Transfiguration. They think of it as a Biblical version of Hollywood “special effects.” The inference is that what is described here must have had a much more ordinary origin. But all the remembrances of the “special effects,” the disciples being heavy with sleep, the

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Feast of the
Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus Christ
August 6, 2019

+

fear, the ecstasy, the Lord's appearance with Moses and Elijah, did not *invalidate* what happened. The conviction of the gospel is that the apostles were experiencing the Glory of God, and their perceptions were not less real but more real.

Supernatural is not less natural. It is *higher* natural. It is natural elevated by the Creator of natural. We might think of it as the difference between a postcard scene of Lisbon, and being in Lisbon itself. Most of the time we view reality with the quality and accuracy of a photograph. It cannot hold a candle to a visit and experience of Lisbon itself. But even this is only an earthly analogy of what it means to be with the Lord. The day will come when we will no longer need sacraments or stained-glass windows, or vestments or incense, or a ministerial priesthood. We will see the glory.

So, because His friends needed a boost, The Lord Jesus lifted a corner of the veil which separates the natural plane from God, and gave Peter and the others a glimpse of Divine glory. They would forever after be at a loss to describe the impact of God's glory upon them. When it happens, words are useless.

Some of you know the story the All Saints' Catonsville sisters tell of a man taking his morning exercise run in the snow-covered woods in Maryland. Suddenly the deer were all around him, running alongside him. Together they jumped fallen tree trunks, swerved around bushes, and splashed through creeks. And for a while, *for a magnificent while*, the runner kept up with these splendid animals. He was one with them. But a man wasn't designed to keep up with deer in the woods, and he finally fell down, cut and bruised. When he came home, his wife was horrified, thinking he had been hit by a car. He breathlessly told her he was all right and went on to say he had just had the most exhilarating experience of his life. He tried to explain, but his words would not do justice to the experience. What Peter, James, and John witnessed on the mount of Transfiguration must have been like that *only greater*.

Peter said "It is good for us to be here." The Transfiguration was a vindication of Peter's expression of faith in Jesus as the Christ. It was good also to hear Jesus,

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Feast of the
Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus Christ
August 6, 2019

+

Moses, and Elijah, in the light of Divine glory, discussing the Passion not as a tragedy but as *the Divine scheme*. The Transfiguration set Divine approval on what would happen. And that would be the basis of apostolic hope.

It is also good *for us* that Peter and the others had this experience. This is a warning that the invitation to walk closer with the Lord can come at any time, unexpected, and unplanned, like deer in the woods, and bring to an ordinary moment an extraordinary experience. That is the moment we recognize Christ not as a postcard photo but as a Real Presence. And then when with Peter and the rest, we afterwards suffer in our own struggles and persecutions, we too can look back on the experience of the glory, and be assured and comforted.