

In Nomine Jesu

Prayer Upon Entering Church: O God, in the glorious Transfiguration of Your only-begotten Son You once confirmed the Mysteries of the Faith by the testimony of the ancient Fathers, and in the Voice that came from the bright cloud You wondrously foreshowed our adoption by grace. Therefore mercifully make us coheirs with our King of His glory, and bring us to the fullness of our inheritance in heaven; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Text

Luke 9:28-43

Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. ³⁰And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, ³¹who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³²Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"— not knowing what he said. ³⁴As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" ³⁶And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

³⁷On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. ³⁹And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth; and shatters him, and will hardly leave him. ⁴⁰And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." ⁴¹Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?"

Bring your son here." ⁴²While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³And all were astonished at the majesty of God.

The Sermon **Love Comes Down**

You may not have realized it when you walked into church this morning, but this Sunday is a major turning point in the Church's Year. Only Palm Sunday can beat it for high drama. Today, the transfigured Christ turns His blazing face toward disfigurement – and certain death – in Jerusalem – at the hands of His enemies.

This week – His Church therefore also turns away from the light of Epiphany – and heads into the shadows of the “gesima” Sundays and the season of pre-Lent. According to Saints Matthew – Mark – and Luke – this event called the Transfiguration – is **the most unambiguous revelation** of Jesus – as the Messiah – prior to the Resurrection.

As Saints Peter – James – and John – watch the dazzling scene unfold before them – the Voice of God Himself – declares Jesus – to be – His Son. The appearance of Moses and Elijah – ratifies the designation - of Jesus as the Chosen One of Israel. He is the fulfillment of the Law – which Moses gave – and of the Prophets – of whom Elijah is chief.

This then – is the original “mountaintop experience.” And our old friend Peter – always the one to speak first – and later to regret it – delivers one of his biggest idiotic statements on this occasion. He goes: “Hey Lord – like wow man – this is far out fantastic! *“Let’s put up three tents – one for you – one for Moses – and one for Elijah.”* Peter didn’t know what he was talking about. (verse 33)

It is part of our fallen human nature – to want to build booths – and ski lodges – and resort hotels – on top of mountains. We don't want to come down from the Rocky Mountain high. We want the romance to go on forever – indefinitely – and if it doesn't – we will try any number of artificial aids – to make it last longer.

But Jesus knows He can't stay on the summit – soaking up the view. He and Moses and Elijah speak together – but not about peak experiences. They speak about “*Jesus' approaching death – and what He was about to fulfill in Jerusalem.*” (v. 31) Then – “*a cloud overshadowed them. Peter and James and John were frightened – terrified* is how St. Mark puts it – *as they went into the cloud.*” (v. 34)

Because Peter and James and John saw things - that day - on that mountain. They saw Jesus – with the veil lifted – to reveal His glory. And then they saw the clouds coming. But you see – love can't stay - on the mountaintop! It has to come down to where sick people wait with frothing mouths and suffering from convulsions. Love has to go – where it is needed most – not at the pinnacle of youth and beauty and sexiness – but in the valley of the shadow of death.

And death is a dark valley. But as St. Paul said: “*Love never stops being patient – never stops believing – never stops hoping – never gives up.*” (I Cor 13:7) Love is grateful for the experience on the mountaintop – to be sure – but it knows that it cannot stay there. Love persists – even when the glory has faded – even when the romance has fled – and when the curtain has been dropped with finality on the stage set.

“*Love never gives up. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love isn't jealous. It doesn't sing its own praises. It isn't arrogant. It isn't rude. It doesn't think about itself. It isn't irritable. Love never comes to an end.*” (I Cor 13:4-5, 8) – as St. Paul says to the church in Corinth. And love doesn't require reciprocity. Love gets down on the dirty – gritty – pavement. Love goes down to Jerusalem – where the enemy lies in wait.

Many years ago – when my hair had no grey – and my beard was entirely black – I visited an 8 year old girl – dying of cancer. Her body was disfigured by her disease – and its treatment. As I entered her room – I was overcome almost immediately – by her suffering – **so unjust – so unreasonable!** Even more overpowering – however – was the presence of her grandmother – lying in a bed beside her – with her huge body – embracing the precious inhuman suffering.

I stood in awe – because I knew that day that I was on holy ground. The suffering of little children is horrifying beyond words. I will never forget the great – gentle – arms and body – of that magnificent grandmother. She never spoke a word that day while I was there – anointing her body with oil to prepare it for her death and resurrection. She was holding – and participating – in suffering that she **could not** relieve. And yet somehow – her silent presence **was** relieving it. No words could express the magnitude of her love. See – *“love never stops being patient – never gives up.”* (I Cor 13:7)

On this day – Jesus turns His back on His glory. And He begins His descent into the valley. He comes down from the mountain. He comes down from the throne of the majesty on high. He comes down from the infinite spaces of uncreated light – and He prepares to enter the darkness of human suffering – and human pain.

My brothers and sisters – God isn't looking down with detachment on us – from some great distance! God didn't remain majestically aloof somewhere over the rainbow! God isn't a mere distant observer of our struggles! Does God care when you're sick? Does God care when you hurt! Does care when you're dying? You bet He does! Yes, the Savior-God does care! His Name is Jesus. So Jesus sets His face toward Jerusalem. He embraces **all** the misery – of **all** the world! He enters **our** bodies – with **His** Body and Blood.

And so wherever on human being reaches out for another in the midst of suffering – whenever a person in power stoops down to help – wherever the mighty bend to the lowly – there is the Savior-Lord in the person of the one helping! And whenever you do this – you are becoming a disciple of the Master. This then is our purpose here.

We point people to Jesus – a Jesus who reaches out – a Jesus who comes down – a Jesus who seeks you – a Jesus who finds you – a Jesus who embraces you – a Jesus who goes to Jerusalem for you – a Jesus who clothes Himself in bread and wine for you. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds + in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!