

6 August – The Transfiguration of the Lord A

First reading Daniel 7:9-10.13-14

As I watched: Thrones were set in place and one of great age took his seat. His robe was white as snow, the hair of his head as pure as wool. His throne was a blaze of flames, its wheels were a burning fire. A stream of fire poured out, issuing from his presence. A thousand thousand waited on him, ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. A court was held and the books were opened. I gazed into the visions of the night. And I saw, coming on the clouds of heaven, one like a son of man. He came to the one of great age and was led into his presence. On him was conferred sovereignty, glory and kingship, and men of all peoples, nations and languages became his servants. His sovereignty is an eternal sovereignty which shall never pass away, nor will his empire ever be destroyed.

Second reading 2 Peter 1:16-19

It was not any cleverly invented myths that we were repeating when we brought you the knowledge of the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; we had seen his majesty for ourselves.

He was honoured and glorified by God the Father, when the Sublime Glory itself spoke to him and said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour." We heard this ourselves, spoken from heaven, when we were with him on the holy mountain. So we have confirmation of what was said in prophecies; and you will be right to depend on prophecy and take it as a lamp for lighting a way through the dark until the dawn comes and the morning star rises in your minds.

Gospel Matthew 17:1-9

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone. There in their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. "Lord," he said "it is wonderful for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and from the cloud there came a voice which said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him." When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. But Jesus came up and touched them. "Stand up," he said "do not be afraid." And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but only Jesus. As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order, "Tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead."

Meditation

This feast is of Eastern origin. It may have commemorated the date of the dedication of the church erected on Mount Tabor in honour of the Lord's Transfiguration. In the West the celebration of the Tabor event was observed on the Second Sunday of Lent because of its close connection with the Lord's temptation in the desert (gospel of the First Sunday of Lent). The celebration on August 6 was taken up by some dioceses in Spain, Southern France and Southern Italy during the eighth to tenth centuries. In 1457 the feast was extended to the entire Western Church in honour of the defeat of the Turks at Belgrade. The word "transfiguration" evokes the faces of men and women who have known suffering but who radiate an inner light that illumines the very depths of their being.

We might think of Helen Keller who saw light in her darkness and revealed it to others, Martin Luther King, Jr. who had been to the mountain and brought back a dream, or Archbishop Oscar Romero whose vision of Christ's glory strengthened him even for death.

The transfiguration is more than a momentary flash of divine glory, a prelude to Jesus' Passover and final coming. It also reveals the hope to which we are all called: "the glory of God is humanity fully alive" (Irenaeus). In the past, every icon painter began his career by reproducing the scene of the transfiguration, not to escape into some imaginary paradise, but to die to himself by opening himself to Beauty crucified. The destiny of every Christian is written between two mountains: from Calvary to the mountain of the transfiguration. The face of the living God is to be seen in the faces of those who listen to Christ's word and are transformed by it.