

6 August – The Transfiguration of the Lord B

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 a 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 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

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. “Rabbi”, he said “it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you one for Moses and one for Elijah” He did not know what to say; they were so frightened. And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and there came a voice from the cloud, “This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him”. Then suddenly, when they looked round, they saw no one with them any more but only Jesus.

As they came down from the mountain he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what “rising from the dead” could mean.

Meditation

The 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 scene of the transfiguration, not to escape into some imaginary paradise, but to die 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.