

Transfiguration B (2/22/09 – Jesus – Epiphanied in Glory as the Beloved Son)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

There was much that was unknown to the disciples – even when it was right before their faces ... or had been clearly explained to them. And there was much that caused them to fear. Our *Holy Gospel Lesson* for this *Feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord* starts out this way: ***After six days Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.*** [MK 9.2] The question that perhaps came to mind when you first heard this was: *Six days after what?* The question we should ask – so that we rightly understand the context of this glorious, one-of-a-kind event – is: *What was so important that Mark felt compelled to begin the glorious Transfiguration pointing back to it? How does that event six days earlier inform our understanding so that we can interpret **this** event correctly?* And the answer is: Jesus had asked what people thought of Him – Who they thought He was/is; Peter had made the great confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; Jesus gave His first prediction regarding His Passion; and then Peter let satan use him to try to distract Jesus from His divine task (for which Peter was rebuked by our Lord). This is what happened six days earlier.

Let's go back to our Lord's prediction of His Passion. Right after Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ ... the Messiah, the Savior – by revelation of the Father through the work of the Holy Spirit – Mark records these words: ***And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.*** [8.31] The next verse says that Jesus ***said this plainly*** – no figures of speech, no parables, no softening the blow. And that was the last that Jesus spoke of it again ... for six days. Just think how the disciples felt. It is like knowing that your company is almost certainly going to lay people off sometime soon – but how soon? ... how many? ... will it be you? It is like knowing that your car needs repairs ... it isn't working right – but what kind of repairs? ... how long will you be without it? ... how much will it cost? ... how long will it last then? It is like diligently saving for a big expenditure ... or retirement ... and carefully investing, only to find the economy (and your investments) crashing around you – will your savings be enough to get that education? ... will your retirement last? ... will things pick up before your money runs out? ... what will we do if we run out? ... how will we make it? It is – was – **just** like getting the bad news that a loved one has terminal cancer – and then waiting a week for more information so that you know just how long your loved one has. You know that the end is immanent – not yet, perhaps ... but soon ... any moment ... and then your life is going to be changed completely ... and you can't even begin to imagine

it ... comprehend it.

The disciples were, no doubt, afraid ... and perplexed. Salvation itself seems to be on the line. This isn't the way they thought the whole Messiah-salvation thing would come down. We know how they feel – we get perplexed and afraid, too. Life isn't going the way we envisioned. We are tempted to doubt – we doubt our future well-being ... and God's provision ... we doubt God Himself ... our Lord ... our forgiveness ... our salvation ... our eternal life. That's sin, you know, to doubt God's love and care for us – whether because of financial hardship or health problems – to doubt God's salvation for us. It's something we need to repent of ... turn away from ... and turn back to God – **and God alone** – in faith.

But that can be, oh, so difficult for us – indeed, it is impossible without the work of God in our lives ... in our hearts. And it is to combat just such doubt and weakness of faith that Christ gives us a glimpse of His glory here on the Mount of Transfiguration. It was to prepare His disciples for the long haul of the last six (or so) months of His earthly life – in which Jesus' popularity spiraled ever downward ... leading toward the difficult *Holy Week* that culminated in His Passion and Burial – that Christ gave Peter and James and John such an incredible epiphany of the glorious future. And it is to likewise prepare **us** for the “long haul” of *Lent* – and to strengthen us in the long haul of our daily lives on this sin-cursed earth – that the Church celebrates the *Feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord* and that today we see *Jesus – Epiphanied in Glory as the Beloved Son*.

And an incredible vision this is – *The Transfiguration of Our Lord* – a revelation we do well to ponder in detail, that we might better understand it. The original Greek for *was transfigured* is the word we get *metamorphosis* from – Jesus was metamorphosed ... transformed ... changed in appearance before them. Our *Gospel* says that Jesus' *clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them* [9.3]. Matthew's Gospel speaks of Jesus' face shining like the sun [MT 17.2]. What does this signify? Simply that the glory of the divinity of the Son of God was at that moment shining through, unveiled. Recall in our *Old Testament Lesson* how Moses' face shone after speaking with God ... and the people of Israel *were afraid to come near him* [EXO 34.30]. That was just a residual reflection of the glory of God in the face of Moses – imagine what the real thing would be like. In one of his God-given visions, Daniel describes the appearance of the Son of Man this way: *His body was like beryl, His face like the appearance of lightning, His eyes like flaming torches, His arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of His words like the sound of a multitude*. [DAN 10.6] The Apostle St. John was given a similar vision, which he describes in the first chapter of REVELATION: *His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine*

brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. [1.14–16] Just imagine what Peter, James, and John were seeing – and Moses and Elijah to boot! No wonder Peter *did not know what to say* ... no wonder *they were terrified* [MK 9.6].

Here is Jesus revealed before them in all His glory – *Epiphanied in Glory as the Beloved Son*. But it will not do to *make three tents* [9.5] ... one for each of them ... as if they were equals. Moses, the receiver of the Law, had beheld God on Mt. Sinai – but that reflected glory was continually fading in him ... *being brought to an end* our *Epistle Lesson* says [2COR 3.13]. Elijah, representing all the Prophets, had been taken up to see and live with God without dying ... in a glorious whirlwind of fire. These were great men of God, to be sure ... whom God had used to give us His Law and Gospel promises in the Old Testament – but they are not equals with the Son. There will be no sharing of the Son’s divine glory with any others. That is why the *cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is My beloved Son; listen to Him.”* [9.7] That is why, when *suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only* [9.8]. For in the end – when all is said and done – He ... Jesus ... is the only One that matters. It is His Word that matters ... His Word that we must listen to ... His life and death and resurrection from the dead that we must cling to ... if we wish to one day see this glorious vision with our own eyes.

The Law is good – it reveals to us the perfect, holy will of God for our lives. But it always condemns us – even as it leads us in good works that are beneficial for our neighbor and pleasing to God when done in faith. The Prophets are good and necessary – they pointed to the Anointed One Who would fulfill all of the Law for us and for our forgiveness, life, and salvation. But prophecy comes to an end – while the work of Christ to Whom they pointed endures forever. Moses and Elijah were holy men of God – His blessed instruments for the revealing of His Word and gracious mercy to the world; but the beloved Son has now come – Who has spoken to us in these last days [HEB 1.2] ... indeed, Who has **more than** spoken ... Who has acted on our behalf ... and for our eternal good ... Who has *suffer[ed] many things and be[en] rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be[en] killed, and after three days [has] rise[n] again* ... all for us and for our eternal salvation!

Today we see *Jesus – Epiphanied in Glory as the Beloved Son*. Today we see the veil lifted but only for a moment. For until we behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled face – in heaven ... or at His glorious return – we see Him only through the veil of His Means of Grace ... His Word and His Sacraments. But it is

the same glorious Lord – and this is all we need: ***Jesus only***. Christ is here with us – on the plain of our earthly lives. Christ is here with us in the *Divine Service ...* all-glorious ... yet veiled under the earthly elements bread and wine. Let us heed the glorious word of the Father ... and listen to His beloved Son, Who says: ***Take, eat; this is My Body, which is given for you. ... Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the New Testament in My Blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.***

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]