

Transfiguration (comm. Trinity VIII) St. Bride from 2006 SS P&P S Michael

‘We have not followed cunningly devised fables.’

S. Peter was clearly very concerned in this epistle, to let everyone know that even as strange as the story might seem to those who hear it, this really did happen. It is important to understand that as S. Peter writes, he has become the very Apostle that Jesus sought: a far cry from the impulsive and arrogant man who went with Jesus, James and John onto that mountain: where the three could not understand what had occurred, until after the Resurrection, when the blindfolds were lifted from their eyes.

There were three apostles who accompanied Jesus onto the mountain: Peter, James and John: and it is in the Gospels of SS Matthew, Mark and Luke that we hear of the transfiguration, as well, of course, from S. Peter – the eyewitness, who was there at the time - in his second epistle, from which we heard today (2 Peter 1.16-21).

In the first chapter of Genesis (v27), we read of how man is created in the image of God: ‘God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them’. And God blessed them.

But they were not created as God: they were in his image: so that we might understand that although we have received God’s blessing, and we resemble God in appearance, we are not as God: our earthly bodies are a reflection of Him. S. Paul reminds us of this, in his second epistle to the Corinthians (5.1-4), ‘For we know that if the earthly tent we live in (our body) be destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling, so that putting it on we might not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.’

Therefore, in the story of this miraculous event as told by S. Peter, we are able to see through the eyes of SS Peter, James and John, a glimpse of that heavenly kingdom, and of the heavenly bodies which we shall inherit when we too ascend to be with God the Father in heaven above: for as S. Matthew tells us, Jesus, with ‘raiment white as the light’, and whose ‘face did shine as the sun’, was stood talking with Moses and Elijah: Moses, whose face shone with a radiance which scared Aaron and all the Israelites, when he came down from God and descended from Mount Sinai bearing the second set of stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. And Elijah, the one remaining prophet, who met God in that ‘still small voice’ (1 Kings 19.3-18): who did His will even when this placed him in grave risk of his life, and who was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind, separated from his servant Elisha by a chariot and horses of fire (2 Kings.2, 11-12).

In this happening of the Transfiguration of Our Lord, we see Jesus, Elijah and Moses, each in their true heavenly appearance: in so many ways the same as we might have known them when they were here on earth, but, in the words of S. Paul (1.Cor.13, 9-10), ‘When perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.’ And, ‘Now we see through a glass darkly, but then we shall see face to face’. So on the mountain, we see perfection: the imperfect has disappeared: we see face to face.

The transfiguration was a foretaste of what is to come: both a sign of the love of God for Jesus, His Son, and for the salvation promise for all who believe in Him, and also that the end of this life is but a stage in a journey which may lead us along paths we cannot now understand or discern: but along which we can travel in sure and certain faith that if it is our Lord's will, then it is right and true and safe. And along which we also might hear the words spoken by God of His Son, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased".

The transfiguration was not a myth, it was not one of the many imaginative stories which circulated through the efforts of the many false prophets and heretics who were 'spreading divisive opinions and teachings which might lead to the spiritual and moral destruction of those who accept them' (NIV study Bible, p.1899). The situation then was not that much different from the situation today: where the reinterpretation of events such as the Transfiguration are also spread abroad by those who appear to have the veneer of the true faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ: so the danger of 'spiritual and moral destruction' is with us this day, as it was when S. Peter was writing his epistle: and we too have to be able to defend his words, and that 'We have not followed cunningly devised fables.'

May we all take heed, in the words of S. Peter, 'as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts'. Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit: and even today, holy men of God still speak as they are moved by the Holy Spirit, and may we all have the discernment and gift through the Grace of God brought into our hearts by the Holy Ghost, to hear and understand these words spoken for our salvation and eternal life. Because then too, saved, we shall be transfigured with our heavenly bodies, and in the company of all the saints who have gone before us.

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