

12TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (THE HOLY TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR
LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST)
AUGUST 6/19, 2007

II PETER 1: 10-19

ST. MATTHEW 17: 1-9

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Gospel *And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.*

Concerning Christ's Transfiguration

The Selection

Christ took Peter, John and James with Him to the high mountain Mount Tabor) and was transfigured before them. He chose each according to His feelings for them, theirs for him and a specific characteristic. He chose Peter for his strong love for the Lord, John for Christ's love for him and James for his zeal. This is James the Great not James the Just of Jerusalem. James' zeal "is evident from his promise to drink the cup that Christ would drink (St. Matthew 20:22) and from the fact that Herod slew him with the sword to please the Jews".¹

(On this occasion) the Lord took only three disciples, Peter, James and John, as the first and greatest among the other disciples: Peter, who confessed Him to be the Son of God and God, and loved Him more on account of the fervour of his faith; John, who was beloved of Christ Himself on account of his great virtue; and James, who was ardent with zeal for Christ Himself...²

Also these three could keep a secret and not tell anyone about what they had seen.³

The Transfigured Lord's Appearance

The face of the Saviour shone with radiance as the sun and His raiment was white as the light, "in the same manner will He come from the heavens to judge all, like terrible lightening, with power and great glory".⁴ His countenance was changed, but he did not alter in nature; yet, His face became exceedingly bright and more beautiful than the sun. His garments were not substantively changed, but they took on a different appearance, becoming "whiter than snow".⁵ Christ's face showing His radiant transfiguration reflects the glory of His Second Coming.⁶

Why Did He Take Them To The Mountain?

The Lord liked to 'retire' to a mountain to pray and be alone with the Father. Here He takes the disciples with Him to show them His kingdom where in the future "He would come and both He and the righteous would be radiant".⁷ He brought them to a high mountain to spiritually emphasise that a man must be raised up high if he is to be "worthy of such divine visions," and the high mountain apart would allow Him to perform His miracles in secret as He was wont to do.⁸

Moses And Elijah Appear

Why?:

To show that He is Lord of the law and of the prophets, and of the living and of the dead. For Elijah was a prophet and still lived, while Moses was a lawgiver and had died.⁹

...

Moses and Elijah stood with Christ as He prayed, in order to demonstrate that he was not contrary to the Law and the Prophets; for had he been opposed to them, neither Moses, the giver of the Law, nor Elijah, the most ardent zealot of all the prophets, would have

been willing to stand before Him and render Him service.¹⁰

Their joint appearance was also to combat the theory some held that he was Elijah or another of the prophets.¹¹ Christ in showing them Moses and Elijah was teaching them to be like them, meek and at the same time a leader as Moses and zealous and steadfast as Elijah plus fearless for the truth as both were.¹² St. John Chrysostom adds another reason:

To show the glory of the Cross, and to console Peter and the others in their dread of the Passion, and to raise up their minds.¹³

How did the disciples know who they were?

It would seem, then, that they recognised them by the words which they were speaking. For Moses perhaps was saying, 'Thou art He Whose Passion I prefigured when I slaughtered the lamb and performed the Pascha,' and Elijah, 'Thou art He Whose Resurrection I prefigured when I raised the widow's son,' and such words as these.¹⁴

Peter Doesn't Understand

Peter loved Christ dearly and did not want Him to suffer. He advocated staying on the mountain so the Lord wouldn't go down and be killed.¹⁵ He desired that Christ avoid His Passion, the Cross, but this was unthinkable:

The Lord, however, longed to be crucified and to suffer for our sake; for it was His will and good pleasure that in this way, by His Cross and Death, the human race should be saved.¹⁶

The Cloud Receives Christ

Peter wanted to make three tabernacles; one for Elijah, another for Moses and one for Christ. But these would have been made of hands, and whilst he spoke the Father formed a cloud around them, which was a tabernacle not made with hands:

(The cloud showed) that just as He Himself appeared as God in a cloud to the men of old, so also does His Son now appear in a cloud. Here the cloud is bright, not dark as in the time of old, for Hse desires not to bring fear but to teach.¹⁷

Christ entered into the tabernacle in the form of a cloud with Moses and Elijah to show that He was not inferior to the invisible God the Father:

Just as in the Old Testament it was said that God had a cloud, and that Moses entered into the cloud and there received the Law, so also now a cloud receives Christ, and the Prophets Elijah and Moses entered into it. The cloud, however, was not dark, since the shadow of the Law had passed away, and dark ignorance was gone. It was a bright cloud which overshadowed them; for the truth had come, and the grace of the Lord had shone forth. There is nothing dark or shadowy now, but all is beautiful and light-bearing for the pure in heart.¹⁸

The Father Speaks

God declares from the cloud This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased. The disciples then saw no other but Christ, Who is seen as alone. Thus there is no doubt that the voice refers to Jesus: “the voice was for Christ, as He is the Son”.¹⁹ The Father’s voice announces that the time of the Prophets and the Law “were only meant to last for a certain time,” Moses and Elijah are now gone and “Christ alone remained”.²⁰

The Father’s words taught the disciples to listen to Christ and not oppose His crucifixion:²¹

(The Father) teaches ‘Hear ye Him and if He willeth to be crucified, oppose Him not.’²²

Don’t Tell Anyone

In humility, Christ instructs them to keep quiet about what they had seen:²³

The Apostles held their peace, and said nothing to anyone. It was not fitting that before the Crucifixion anything be said of Christ that was proper only to God; otherwise, if men heard glorious things spoken of Him, and then saw Him crucified, what would they have thought of Him? They would have thought that Christ’s works were all a deception, an illusion. For this reason, of all the glorious deeds proper to God which the Apostles were vouchsafed to see, they proclaimed not one before the Crucifixion.²⁴

Christ's transfiguration manifested in radiant light that blinded the disciples. We, too, may receive the Holy Spirit's grace which "appears in an ineffable light to all to whom God reveals its action":

And in fact the Lord has frequently demonstrated before many witnesses how the grace of the Holy Spirit acts on people whom He has sanctified and illumined by His great inspiration [14]. Remember Moses after his talk with God on Mount Sinai. He so shone with an extraordinary light that people were unable to look at him. He was even forced to wear a veil when he appeared in public. Remember the Transfiguration of the Lord on Mount Tabor. A great light encircled Him, and His raiment became shining, exceedingly white like snow (Mk. 9:3), and His disciples fell on their faces from fear. But when Moses and Elias appeared to Him in that light, a cloud overshadowed them in order to hide the radiance of the light of the divine grace which blinded the eyes of the disciples. Thus the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God appears in an ineffable light to all to whom God reveals its action.

St. Seraphim of Sarov in his Conversation of St. Seraphim With N.A. Motovilov²⁵

How can we recognise the grace of God? "The grace of the Holy Spirit is the light which enlightens man." How will we know that we are in the Holy Spirit's grace? We need to seek the Divine knowledge not of this world: "This knowledge which is full of love for God and for our neighbour builds up every man for his salvation.." How can we be certain that He manifests Himself in us, that we are in the spirit of God? In other words, how do we recognise His presence within us? Recognise His presence within us as the Apostles did and as St. Seraphim of Sarov explained in his conversations with N.A. Motovilov!

Thus the holy Apostles were consciously aware of the presence in themselves of the Spirit of God.

...

I feel such calmness and peace in my soul that no words can express it.

...

An extraordinary sweetness.

...

An extraordinary joy in my heart.

...

An extraordinary warmth.

...

And so it must be in actual fact, for the grace of God must dwell within us, in our heart, because the Lord said: The Kingdom of God is within you (Lk. 17:21). By the Kingdom of God the Lord meant the grace of the Holy Spirit. This Kingdom of God is now within us, and the grace of the Holy Spirit shines upon us and warms us from without as well. It fills the surrounding air with many fragrant odours, sweetens our senses with heavenly delight and floods our hearts with unutterable joy. Our present state is that of which the Apostle says; The Kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). Our faith consists not in the plausible words of earthly wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and power (cp. I Cor.2:4). St. Seraphim (all indented above)²⁶

We need to approach the Lord humbly with our prayers and strive continuously to be on and not deviate from the Royal Path. The grace of the Holy Spirit is available to all of us and our access to it does not rely on Church rank:

The fact that I am a Monk and you are a layman is utterly beside the point. What God requires is true faith in Himself and His Only-begotten Son. In return for that the grace of the Holy Spirit is granted abundantly from on high.

The Lord listens equally to the Monk and the simple Christian layman provided that both are Orthodox believers, and both love God from the depth of their souls, and both have faith in Him, if only as a grain of mustard seed; and they both shall move mountains. 'One shall move thousands and two tens of thousands' (cp. Deut. 32:30). The Lord Himself says: All things are possible to him who believes (Mk. 9:23).

St. Seraphim (yet again)²⁷

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Blessed Theophylact, *Explanations of the Holy Gospel of St. Matthew, Vol. I*, (translated from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade) Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 145.

² *The Gospel Commentary (Lessons Taken from the Holy Gospel and from Many of the Divine Writings of Our Father among the Saints, John Chrysostom)* (translated from the Slavonic into English by Hieromonk German Ciuba), Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, Pennsylvania, 2002, pp. 815-816.

³ *ibid.*, p. 816.

⁴ *id.*, p. 814.

⁵ *id.*, p. 816.

⁶ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

⁷ *id.*, p. 144.

⁸ *id.*, p. 145.

⁹ *id.*, p. 146.

¹⁰ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 816.

¹¹ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

¹² *id.*

¹³ [Hom. 56, P.G. 58:566, 567 (cols. 550, 551).] cited in *The Orthodox New Testament Holy Gospel, Volume 1 (Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged)* October 2000, Holy Apostles Convent/Dormition Skete, Buena Vista, Colorado, *St. Matthew*, Endnote # 156, p. 107.

¹⁴ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

¹⁵ *id.*

¹⁶ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 817.

¹⁷ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

¹⁸ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, pp. 817-818.

¹⁹ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 147, and see *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 818.

²⁰ *id.*, p. 818.

²¹ *id.*

²² Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

²³ *id.*

²⁴ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 818.

²⁵ <http://www.stseraphim.org/wonderfulrevelation.html>.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *id.*