

The Transfiguration of the Lord

Matthew 17:1-9

1 Six days later Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone. 2 There in their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. 3 Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him. 4 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.' 5 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.' 6 When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. 7 But Jesus came up and touched them. 'Stand up,' he said, 'do not be afraid.' 8 And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but only Jesus. 9 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.'

Other readings: Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 Psalm 96 (97) 2 Peter 1:16-19

Since it is a Feast of the Lord, the Transfiguration takes precedence over the ordinary Sunday celebration whenever 6th August falls on a Sunday. The Gospel of the Transfiguration is read, as it is every year on the Second Sunday of Lent, when we recall the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem.

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, all of whom recount the incident, it is found just as Jesus is beginning his journey to Jerusalem, where he will be arrested, tortured and executed. The Transfiguration provides a glimpse of something beyond the apparent tragedy of the Cross. Jesus is at prayer and it is at this moment that the disciples witness a transformation. In Matthew both his face and his garments are miraculously changed, suggesting something beyond our experience.

The vision seen by the three disciples is further enriched by the presence of Moses and Elijah, who can be understood as bearing witness to Jesus. It is they who along with so many prophets and holy people have prepared for the coming of the Messiah.

The cloud and the voice are also part of this experience. As on so many occasions in the Old Testament they speak of the presence of God. The climax comes when God speaks, calling Jesus his 'beloved Son', and commanding the disciples to 'listen'.

As Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem, courageously facing whatever will meet him there, the disciples are encouraged to follow his way. They may well face suffering and even death, but the way of Jesus truly leads to life. The event so struck the three disciples that they never forgot it, and it became a valuable part of the gospel witness to Jesus, assuring all faithful disciples of future glory.

Why do we celebrate the Transfiguration of Jesus?

What is the sense of the presence of Moses and Elijah?

We thank God for the faithful witness of Christ, who encourages us on our journey.

We pray for a deeper appreciation of the witness of the prophets and evangelists.