

The Transfiguration (Mt 17:1-13)

From the day Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Master "began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things. . . and be killed, and on the third day be raised." Peter scorns this prediction, nor do the others understand it any better than he. In this context the mysterious episode of Jesus' Transfiguration takes place on a high mountain, before three witnesses chosen by himself: Peter, James and John. Jesus' face and clothes become dazzling with light, and Moses and Elijah appear, speaking "of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem". A cloud covers him and a voice from heaven says: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" For a moment Jesus discloses his divine glory, confirming Peter's confession. He also reveals that he will have to go by the way of the cross at Jerusalem in order to "enter into his glory". Moses and Elijah had seen God's glory on the Mountain; the Law and the Prophets had announced the Messiah's sufferings. Christ's Passion is the will of the Father: the Son acts as God's servant; The cloud indicates the presence of the Holy Spirit. "The whole Trinity appeared: the Father in the voice; the Son in the man; the Spirit in the shining cloud." On the threshold of the public life: the baptism; on the threshold of the Passover: the Transfiguration. Jesus' baptism proclaimed "the mystery of the first regeneration", namely, our Baptism; the Transfiguration "is the sacrament of the second regeneration": our own Resurrection. From now on we share in the Lord's Resurrection through the Spirit who acts in the sacraments of the Body of Christ. the Transfiguration gives us a foretaste of Christ's glorious coming, when he "will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body." But it also recalls that "it is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God"¹

[The transfiguration] of our Lord on a "high mountain apart," is described by each of the three evangelists (Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). The fullest account is given by Luke, who, no doubt, was informed by Peter, who was present on the occasion. What these evangelists record was an absolute historical reality, and not a mere vision. The concurrence between them in all the circumstances of the incident is exact. Forty years after the event Peter distinctly makes mention of it (2 Pet. 1:16-18).²

A mountain in the Bible is often a place of revelation. Moses and Elijah represented the law and the prophets respectively, which testify to but must give way to Jesus. (The latter is the reason why Peter's suggestion was improper.) Moses was a herald of the Messiah (Deut. 18:18-19). The three booths suggest the Feast of the Tabernacles. Clouds represent divine presence. The close connection of the transfiguration with the confession and passion prediction is significant. The Messiah must suffer; but glorification and enthronement, not suffering, is His ultimate fate. These involve resurrection, ascension, and return in glory. The disciples needed the reassurance of the transfiguration as they contemplated Jesus' death and their future sufferings.³

Exodus 24:12-18 (NRVSA) ¹²The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there;

1 Kings 19:11-13 (NRVSA) ¹¹He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."

Leviticus 23:39-44 (NRSVA) ³⁹Now, the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall keep the festival of the LORD, lasting seven days....

Deuteronomy 18:18 - 19 (NRSVA) ¹⁸I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people;

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 554-556

² Easton's Bible Dictionary

³ Holman Bible Dictionary

