

The Transfiguration of the Lord (A)

(2 Peter 1:16-19 / Matthew 17:1-9)

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Love, Goodness & Peace

The episode of the Transfiguration is not an isolated event, cut off from the whole story of Jesus. The evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke situate the Transfiguration of Jesus in the continuity of his Baptism.

In the river Jordan, we see Jesus being fully human and espousing our humanity in its sinful dimension. In order to reconcile us with God, Jesus had to embrace our weakness and to bear with our fallen state. In his Baptism, Jesus expressed his total solidarity with our sinful humanity.

On the high mountain of the Transfiguration, as he discloses his hidden divine dignity, Jesus dramatically demonstrates to us that there is nothing essentially incompatible between humanity and divinity. If, as St John declares: “from his fullness we have all received” (Jn 1:16), then we too are destined to become not only bearers of divinity, but, as St Peter teaches us: “participants in the divine nature.” (2P 1:4)

The great difference between Jesus and us is that while Jesus is fully human and fully divine, we are wounded in our humanity and in our resemblance to God. Sometimes, too often, we speak and behave in ways that are less than human, in ways that do not reflect what it means to be a human being. In so doing we prevent God’s image and likeness from being restored in us, we prevent the deifying light from shining through us.

The Dean of the Lutheran cathedral of Nidaros in Norway tells the story that one day, as a group of children were visiting the cathedral, he asked them: “Who are the saints?”, a little boy raised his hand and answered: “A person through whom the light shines...”. He had seen the sun shining through the stained glass window in the cathedral.

The Transfiguration of Jesus is the moment when he reveals to us the plenitude of his holiness as Son of God.

Jesus’ holiness is not given to him as a grace as it is for the saints, Christ’s holiness is his own, because he is Light from Light, true God from true God.

What happened to Jesus on the mountain can happen to us each time we allow God’s radiance to shine through us.

There is a very clear link between Jesus’ Baptism and his Transfiguration. In both accounts, we are told that a voice came from heaven and declared: “This is my Son, the Beloved” (Mt 3:17). So for us in order to reclaim our resemblance to God and to become truly human, we must live as sons and daughters of the heavenly Father, as beloved and chosen by God.

In the experience of the Transfiguration, Jesus shows us that, as adoptive children of the Father, in our humanity, wounded and poor as it may be, God’s light can shine through and illumine the world. The bright light which radiates from the transfigured Jesus burns within each one of us like a fire. The fire of the Holy Spirit that Jesus would like to see already kindled here and now (cf. Lk 12:49).

The Transfiguration of Jesus is not only a promise of something which will happen after our death, it begins while we journey here on earth. The Father’s words addressed to the 3 disciples are addressed to each one of us: “You are my son, my daughter, my Beloved.” For this to become reality, for Christ as Light to shine through us we must grow in our dignity as

children of God. In the Rule of the Master, a 6th century monastic rule, we read: “He who resembles his father not only in appearance but also in conduct is a true son” (*Thp* 14).

In the Gospels Jesus tells us explicitly what the conduct of the true children of God is: “Love your enemies, do good, (...) and you will be children of the Most High” (Lk 6:35); “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Mt 5:9).

According to Jesus the instruments we must use in order to be slowly but surely transfigured are: love, goodness and peace.

Love, goodness and peace are not considered in a static way, as realities that we can enjoy on our own but as actions, as driving forces for life. They are clearly other-centred. In loving our enemies, in doing good and in being peace builders, we help our families and communities to become places where all may grow towards fullness of life, but in loving our enemies, in doing good and in being peace builders, we also help ourselves to become more human and more divine.

In one of his sermons, St Colomanus urges us to allow Christ to paint his image in us (*Serm.* XI). He reminds us also that love and peace are the tools for the restoration of God’s likeness in us.

Let us be careful not to import into ourselves despotic images which enslave us. Led by the Spirit which makes us children of God, we are no longer slaves (cf. Gal 4:7; Rm 8:14): slaves to fear and pride which prevent us from being generous and from relating to others with respect, from forgiving and welcoming them, from being selfless and attentive to the needs of our brothers and sisters.

The work of love, goodness and peace may sometimes demand of us a letting go which is somewhat painful, yet “we are God’s masterpiece” (Eph 2:10) so we should not be afraid, our Father knows what is good for us, he will give us what we need (cf. Lk 11:5-8).

With love, goodness and peace, may we work with God’s grace for the preservation and the restoration of the honour and glory that belong to Christ and that have become ours because of our adoption as sons and daughters of God who is the Father of all.