

Sermon—Transfiguration of our Lord
St George Orthodox Church—Albany, NY
Fr John Vazquez
8.6.23

MATTHEW 17.1-9

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit—one God—Amen!

Today we celebrate the transfiguration of our Lord on Mount Tabor with the three disciples Peter James and John

And one of the things this feast is about is glory.

There are two kinds of glory

The glory of men and the glory of God

Most of us know the story in the Old Testament of Job

He was a man with every blessing

He had many children

He had cattle and land

He had every blessing

He had a kind of glory—the glory of men

Well, after a while the devil goes to God and asks permission to attack Job and God grants him this permission

And eventually all this earthly glory is taken from Job—his cattle, his children, his land

But Job does not curse God despite this loss of this earthly glory and so the devil returns to God and says if you allow me to touch his body—to afflict his body—he will curse You.

So God grants the devil this permission and he goes and afflicts Job's body with sores and then even Job's wife tells him to curse God and die—and Job goes outside the city and sits on a dunghill

And there are different traditions about how long Job was outside the city—a week, a year...several years

And so Job lost his earthly glory but in the loss of his earthly glory he gains the second kind of glory—the glory we hear about today with the Transfiguration.

The Fathers of the Church and the Church herself tells us that the Transfiguration takes place 40 days before the Exaltation of the Cross on September 14th.

And this Transfiguration—or rather this opening of eyes of the disciples—because our Lord was always like this but if he were to show himself in this way all the time no one could bear it

We see the disciples on the ground when they behold this glory of the Lord

So when the Lord permits the eyes of the disciples to be opened and they see the glory of the Son of God they will understand that when they see him crucified that He suffers willingly, as the hymn tells us.

And we know that when the Lord hangs on the cross, pouring his life out for the world, then He is revealed truly as the Lord of Glory

Because we remember that on Pascha night when we stand outside the doors of the Church we say that the Lord of Hosts is the King of Glory

The one who was crucified is the Lord of Glory

This one—who hangs on the cross is the Lord of Glory—this is Glory—the cross

Think of that...

And so if we return to Job, who suffered outside of the city and had his body opened up so that he could be revealed to us as one who is exalted and glorious.

And he is exalted and glorious in his suffering—why

He is exalted and glorious in his suffering because he does not curse God for taking away his earthly glory

Job knows that there is a greater glory—the glory of God—and somehow this glory of God consists in humility

So we must have our eyes opened to behold the glory of God as we see today on mount tabor

And how can we have our eyes opened?

The answer lies in Moses and Elijah who stand with Christ on the mountain today.

We have the Law and the prophets that help us to have our eyes opened so that we can see the glory of God

First we have the Law, represented by Moses

The law is given us so that we can have our eyes opened to see the glory of God

And what is the Law—the law is the commandments of Christ starting with the beatitudes which correspond to the ten commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai

But the commandments of Christ are more—we look in the Scriptures and we see wherever Christ says something—do this, or do that and we do those things faithfully in order to keep Christ's commandments

Not because we have to because we don't want to get punished but because we want to, because we want to show our Lord that we love Him.

So this is the first way to begin to lift the veil from our eyes so that we can see the glory of God

The second way is shown to us by Elijah

As one of the prophets he represents those who can see with the mind or with the heart

Yes, with the heart, this is a better way to say it.

Elijah shows us that this is another way to have this veil lifted

The prophets had this vision of the heart

We see that Isaiah and Ezekiel and Elijah and Daniel had this prophetic vision and this prophetic vision comes through prayer

So prayer lifts the veil from our eyes along with following the commandments of Christ

And we see the glory of God

With these two aides—following the commandments and prayer—we can ascend the mountain with the disciples and see the glory of God

And we can see that for someone like Job—who had all his earthly glory taken away from him

And there is nothing wrong with this earthly glory—we want things to go well. I want to have nice things and my children to be healthy—there is nothing wrong with these things but the devil uses these things to keep us from seeing that second and greater glory of God when we become attached to this earthly glory.

So for someone like Job we see that it is when he is on the dunghill with everything taken away from him and he still does not curse God—we see that in this perseverance he is shown forth to have that second kind of glory—the glory of the cross

And this is why we know about Job today—thousands of years after he lived

Because there were many kings who had many blessings—this earthly glory—and we don't know about them

We know about Job though because when this earthly glory was taken away he was shown to have a greater glory

And one could say that this is why God allowed these things to happen to Job—so that we could see this second and greater glory that he had

But why do things have to be this way—why must there be suffering and this second kind of glory?

The Fathers have given many good explanations about why things are the way they are—why man fell in the garden and why the Son had to die on the cross but ultimately this is something that we have to choose to accept and it is difficult

Because difficult things happen

Life is hard

Some of you here are going through very difficult things right now

But we know that in this struggle—if we follow the commandments and we pray for prophetic vision of the heart—that we can have that veil lifted from our eyes and see that it is through our crosses that we join our Lord in glory

God give us strength to keep his commandments and to have the prophetic prayer of the heart so that we—along with the disciples can behold His glory as much as we can bear. Amen!