

February 25, 2018 Blinded By The Light Homily: Brothers and sisters, if you were ever to see an icon, a sacred image of the Transfiguration in one of the Orthodox or Eastern Catholic churches, you might be surprised to learn how the three apostles, Peter, James and John are represented. Bear in mind those three members of Jesus' inner circle will be with him in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before his death. In the Icon, Peter is kneeling and raising his hands to protect his eyes; John crouches on his knees with a hand to his face; and James is lying on the ground face down. Why is this so? One explanation is that the three men are blinded by the light of the transfigured Christ, a light unlike any they had ever seen. In Mark's gospel, we are told that they were terrified. (Mk. 9:6)

The light of the sun is the brightest light in nature. The intensity of the sun's light on a clear afternoon makes it virtually impossible to gaze upon it without hurting our eyes. On the transfigured face of Jesus a ray of light which He held within shines forth. That very same light was to shine on Jesus' face on the day of his resurrection. The Divine radiance on Jesus' face reveals His divine glory. One can appreciate why the Transfiguration is one of the luminous mysteries of the rosary.

In Sacred Scripture, light is often a sign that reveals something of God. In the Nicene Creed that we recite at Sunday mass, we say of Christ that He is "God from God and Light from Light". God is light and Jesus wishes to give his closest friends the experience of this heavenly light which dwells within Him. Elsewhere, in John's gospel, Jesus declares He is the Light of the World.

If we were privileged to witness the Transfiguration event in the twenty-first Century, we might be tempted to capture the moment. We would have our camera ready to film Christ in His glory. But would that be possible? Recently, I asked that question to a professional photographer, who informed me that if light is excessive or too intense, it would overwhelm the camera and spoil the film. It is unlikely a supernatural light can be "caught" on film.

What lessons can we derive from today's gospel?

First, the Transfiguration gives us a rare glimpse of Jesus' true identity and the glorious goal to which His journey will ultimately lead. The light of His transfigured body anticipates the glory of the resurrection;

Second, Jesus expresses His glory to the disciples so that they have the strength to courageously face the scandal of the cross and clearly understand that it is necessary to pass through every trial in life to reach the kingdom of God; and

Third, the light of the Risen Christ shines on us, His disciples. We needn't wait for our life after death to experience His divine, risen presence. As we read in John's gospel, "He who follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life". (Jn.8:12)

In the Book of Exodus, there is a moving account of Moses desiring to see the Face of God. "I pray thee, show me thy glory!" "But you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live. Behold, there is a place beside me where you shall stand upon the rock and when my glory passes by, I will put you in the cleft of a rock and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back. But my face shall not be seen."

“When Moses came down from the mountain, he did not know that his face shone because he had been talking with God”. On the Mount of the Transfiguration, Moses beheld the face of God in Christ. He saw the Divine glory!

Have we ever had a religious experience that filled us with awe and wonder? If our answer is yes, then, quite possibly, we may have been blest with an extraordinary moment of grace and given a brief foretaste of the mystery of heaven.

Amen!