

Sermon for the Feast of the Transfiguration

“And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead.”

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“If any man should come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” So speaks Our Lord immediately previous to his glorious Transfiguration. Now what has this to do with that? What has self-denial and crucifixion on the one hand, and brilliant, shining glorification on the other have to do with each other?

Behold, then, the mystery of faith.

Holy Moses went up upon the Mount of the Giving of the Law to speak to the Lord, *as a man speaks to a friend*, and there he dwelt in the fearsome holiness of the God of Israel. And when he descended to again speak to men, the glory which is of God clung to his face, it shone from his visage.

But Moses would not have them see this glory which shined forth from his face; so he veiled himself. Why?

Was it because such glory was too great for the sinful mass of men to see? But what is Moses but a sinful mass of man, and yet he has seen.

No, he covers his face, for he does not wish that the Hebrews should think the brightness of his form, carried down from Sinai, be confused with the true glory of God. For what is the glory of God? You and I do not know. Let Christ teach us.

St. Peter, James, and John ascend the mountain, and there see the Lord

transfigured, with Moses on the one hand, and Elijah on the other. *'Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'*

And yet not a word does our Lord speak. Rather, a cloud overcomes them, and shields them from the radiance of the Transfigured Christ, even as the veil shielded Israel from the radiance of the face of Moses; for it was not fitting that the disciples should see their Lord in this way. It was not fitting that they should see him in power, and in light. For remember what Our Lord had just instructed them: *'Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.'*

And as the cloud passed, Jesus had returned to his humiliation, *and he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen.*

'Tell no man the things that you have seen.'

Our Lord says this often.

For when he cleansed the leper, he *strictly charged him [to tell no one.]*

And when he shattered death within the girl of twelve years, *he charged [those present] that no man should know about it.*

And when he opened the ears and loosed the tongue of the deaf-mute of the Decapolis, declaring *'Ephphatha', that is, be opened', he charged him that he should tell no man.'*

And when Jesus asked Peter who he was, Holy Peter responded *'Thou art the Christ.'* And Jesus warned him *not to tell anyone about him.'*

Why does Our Lord demand that the manifestation of his glory not be told? Why does he draw a veil across it?

We are fools. Do you not see? His glory is not found in the radiance of Moses,

in the shining brightness and endless power of His Transfiguration. It is not found in His raising of the dead girl, nor in the healing of the ill and stricken.

What, then, is the glory of God?

'If any man should come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.'

Do you not remember? It is in his death that his glory is made manifest, even as St. John recounts as Our Lord approaches his Passion: *'The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.'*

It is the cross which is His glory. It is in the sacrifice of His blood in which his glory is here presented to the world.

For this reason, He commands all to tell no one of His miracles, His identity, His Transfiguration, which we see today, for the Transfiguration is not revelation of His glory; it is the shadow cast into the past of his glorification that is to come on the Friday of His lashing, His suffering, His agony: His glory.

It is sinful man who sees the cross as a means to arrive at the glory we now celebrate in His Transfiguration.

It is sinless God who sees the radiance of the Transfiguration as a means to arrive at the glory we shall celebrate in His Cross.

This is the Wisdom of God, *which is foolishness to man.*

Now the world mocks us, as we wear about our necks, and hang on our doors and walls, and display in our churches the image of a man put to death on the cross, and the instrument of his torture. Perhaps we seem mad, perhaps we are mad! For we display this crucified man wheresoever we go, wheresoever we pray, wheresoever we worship, crying out, 'Behold, the Glory of God!' Mad we are then, with a madness which drives all men to insanity against us, *for the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which will not believe.'* But *'Blessed are they who are not offended*

in me,' saith the Lord.

'A stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the gentiles.'

Now do you see, it is not in outward glory that the glory of God is made manifest, but in shame, nakedness, poverty, suffering, weeping, sorrow, emptiness. If such is the life of *'Him who was crucified before the foundation of the world'* what of us who *'take up our cross and follow him'*?

Where then, do you find glory, even the glory of God? Do not look to ascend into the heavens in ecstatic prayer. Do not expect to find it in the blessings of his life, however lovely and God-given they are. You shall find His glory not in your Transfiguration, but in your cross. There is the way into the heart of God's love; it is down, at the bottom of the mountain of Tabor; at the foot of the mount of Sinai, low, and among the people. It is down, where the cross is; where there is death, where children are cast aside, where spouses yell at one another and ignore each other; where nations rage, and war against one another; where violence prevails over peace, and hatred over gentleness; where men deal in deceit, and truth is a traded commodity. There, *cast as a sheep among wolves*, will you find your cross, will you find your glory, even the *glory of the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.'*

There, *in the shadow of the valley of death* shall you find your cross of glory, yet *you shall fear no evil*. For:

'Whosoever shall lose his life for My name's sake, the same shall gain it.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Exodus

34:29-35; 2 Corinthians 3:12-13, 4:1-6; Mark 9:2-9.