

The feast of the Transfiguration is always celebrated on August 6th. As with all of Revelation, our Lord has important things to tell us with this feast so, since it was recently celebrated, it will be the topic of this article.

Our Lord took the 3 Apostles Peter, James, and John – and only those 3 – up the mountain with Him, believed to be Mount Tabor. St Luke notes that Jesus was praying and while He was praying, He was transfigured before them. One of the, if not *the*, main teachings of the Transfiguration comes from the Apostles' reaction to this. They are so enamored by it, so astounded by what they see and experience, so ecstatic that they don't want to leave. This is why Peter offers to build 3 tents there – one for our Lord, one for Moses, and one for Elijah – so that they can just stay there forever. Peter the ecstatic happiness they were experiencing when he starts by saying: Lord, it is good that we are here. They don't want to leave; this is the key point. Aquinas himself brings out this point.

Why don't they want to leave, and what's the importance of that? What our Lord showed them with the Transfiguration was a very small, brief, dim glimmer of Heaven. The essence of Heaven is being in the presence of the beloved (God) and seeing Him "face-to-face" as Paul puts it; seeing Him in His full glory. This is what our Lord was showing Peter, James, and John. The magnificence of Heaven is so great that even this small, brief, dim glimpse of it is enough to make these Apostles never want to leave.

Another important aspect is that it is only Peter, James, and John that our Lord takes with Him to see it. These are the same 3 that our Lord called to accompany Him most closely in the Garden of Gethsemane on Holy Thursday night. It is only these 3 that really witness the Agony in the Garden. It is with these Apostles, then, by having them at both, that our Lord connects the Transfiguration and His Passion. The Church follows our Lord's connecting of these 2 things by having the Gospel of the Transfiguration during Lent.

The message of this connection between the Transfiguration and our Lord's Passion is at least two-fold. The first, and most obvious one, is that there is no reaching the Kingdom of Heaven, there is no seeing and experiencing what those 3 Apostles saw and experienced, without first suffering (loving) much for the Kingdom of Heaven, for our Father, for the Lord. This is what binds us to Him, this is what makes Heaven, Heaven. Mount Tabor is a steep and hard climb, filled with rocks, trees, and other obstacles. It's not easy to reach the top, a person has to really want it; in fact, a person has to value it above all else. This message runs throughout the Gospels, indeed throughout Scripture, and it is reinforced by the setting of the Transfiguration.

A person has to value it above all else – this is something to keep working on, to attend to and diligently so, throughout our entire life or this world and this life will consume the person and they will lose their true destiny.

So this is one implication of linking our Lord's Transfiguration and the Passion – the "simple" teaching that "there is no Easter Sunday without Good Friday," as Bishop Sheen put it.

But our Lord's linking of His Transfiguration and Passion also teaches us a very practical "spiritual" practice, "practical" in the sense that it is something that needs to be done in everyday life, a habitual way of thinking that needs to be developed. Aquinas brings out most explicitly that our Lord held "the end" – the ultimate end or termination point, purpose we could also say – in His mind during His Passion, namely redemption and the Heavenly Kingdom. Thomas a Kempis wrote a book called "The Imitation of Christ," which is considered a classic in Catholic "spirituality" today. As the name implies, we are meant to imitate Christ. This is true in this case as well. To come directly to the point, what this means is that during times of trial, tribulation, and hardship, all of which can be endured for the sake of the Lord, we are to keep the end – what the Apostles saw at the Transfiguration – at the fore of our mind, otherwise you won't be able to bear it. An immediate corollary of this is that when "storms" hit, it is imperative to keep calling to mind that it will not last forever. We need to develop the habit of thinking in these terms. Start by doing it with small, everyday type things – maybe a headache, or some family friction, whatever it might be. One way or another, this will end. It is not forever. Nothing else, it will end at the time of death. You will be surprised how this one practice, bringing this obvious truth/reality to mind, habitually, relieves a lot of burden and allows you to stay the course. This is really the

main point that I wanted to come to in this article, so let me summarize for the sake of emphasis. During times of trial, hardship, and difficulty – even if I caused it – it is imperative to:

- Keep Heaven in mind when suffering for the sake of what's right and good and true.
- Remember: this will end, one way or another, this will not be forever.

To use the language of Scripture itself, bury this reality deep in your inner room, go to that inner room in any time of trial, and pull this treasure to the fore.

While the above paragraph is what I really wanted to come to, there are other aspects or teachings that tie in with this that can be drawn from the Transfiguration. Perhaps we could first go back to the start of the Transfiguration accounts. Luke says it was 8 days after our Lord said: some here will see the Son of Man coming; Matthew says 6 days after. Aquinas easily resolves the difference, noting that Luke counts the day he made that statement and the day of the Transfiguration, whereas Matthew only counts the days in between. The striking part is that both are drawing attention to creation. The “8th day” in Catholic tradition refers to the time of the new creation at the consummation (end) of this world. The 6th day brings to mind the original 6 days of creation. Recall Pope Benedict XVI's words: the Resurrection created a new way of being human. So what is the Gospel pointing to with this timing? More or less the same thing that the Transfiguration is pointing to – namely Heaven, but also the final Resurrection to new life, a new, magnificent way of being human, but of course only for those who love the Lord in action; i.e., those willing to endure Good Friday for His sake.

Aquinas hones in on a question that might not be obvious. Scripture says that our Lord's clothes became white as light. Aquinas says: why were our Lord's *clothes* transfigured, not just Himself (His face shone like the sun) but His clothes as well? He resolves this question with a verse from Isaiah (Is 49:18) which says: “Lift up your eyes around and see; they all gather, they come to you. As I live, declares the Lord, you shall put them all on as an ornament; you shall bind them on as a bride does.” It's saying that the saints will be like ornaments (or clothing) for the Lord. So our Lord's garments are “made white” signifying the saints, and in particular the purity that those who reach Heaven must attain. This too is a life-long project. If you grow weary of it – remember the Transfiguration! It's hard work, but it's worth it. What else, in the end, is really going to matter?

Why did Moses and Elijah appear with Him? Aquinas accepts the answer given by St John Chrysostom, Father and Doctor of the Church (notice the saints learn from the saints who have gone before them, even Aquinas! To become a saint, we need to do the same). Chrysostom gives multiple reasons for Moses and Elijah being there with our Lord but I will mainly only mention one of them here – namely, that Moses represented “the law” (Moses received the 10 commandments) and Elijah the prophets. Our Lord did not come to set them aside, as He Himself said, but rather to fulfill them. Both Chrysostom and the Catechism bring out that Moses and Elijah longed to see the face of God, and now, at the Transfiguration, they are finally able to do so. Desire for our Lord is necessary to reach Him, and He will not disappoint those that desire.

Perhaps one last thing about the Transfiguration, from the Gospel of Luke, that reinforces the central message of the Transfiguration and inspires hope. Luke relates that our Lord was speaking with Moses and Elijah about His exodus. The first Exodus (recounted in the Book of Exodus, of course) is a central part of Revelation, reflecting what it is that our Lord came to bring. In the first Exodus, the Israelites are delivered from a cruel slavery; they wander in the desert for 40 years; then, those left, a new generation, enter the promised land. Our Lord came to deliver us from a cruel enslavement to sin. The Promised Land (Israel) signifies Heaven, which means that the in-between time (the desert) corresponds to this life and this world. The first Exodus began in Egypt and ended in Jerusalem. At the Transfiguration, our Lord is speaking to Moses and Elijah about *His* Exodus, a *new* Exodus – one that begins in Jerusalem (with His Passion) and ends in the true Promised Land of Heaven. This gives us an overview of our entire existence, both in this life and this world, and in the next. Those Israelites who grumbled and complained against the Lord, who rejected, whose minds were engrossed in just the immediate satisfaction of their own desires – these did not enter the Promised Land. St Peter exhorts us to remember that we are just sojourners in this life and this world; it is just a brief and temporary part of our existence. The Transfiguration is man's true destiny but only those who follow the Lord will reach it.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn