

## **An Unveiled Radiance, Like Our Love A Sermon for Transfiguration Sunday**

*Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking to God.*  
Exodus 34:29

Approaching the Almighty can prove to be a very risky business; at least, by the time the Book of Exodus was compiled. Gone is the coziness of Genesis, when God was said to have strolled in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day. Gone also are those angelic stand-ins for God that converse at length with Abraham and later wrestle with Jacob. The God of our first reading, the God of Mount Sinai, the God whom Moses approaches, while palpably present, nonetheless dwells at a critical distance from human beings.

It's a distance, in fact, that needs always to be mediated; and that's where Moses comes in. We tend to forget that throughout the Exodus story, God, or Yahweh, never actually speaks directly to the Israelites. It is Moses who speaks God's words. It is Moses who delivers the Ten Commandments to the people, Moses who admonishes them on God's behalf. And it is Moses who pleads to Yahweh when those same people have gone astray. Both mediator and intercessor, Moses is the one who comes closest to that awesome and dangerous Presence, and yet is permitted to live.

This privilege, by the way, is not lost on the Israelites, who have threatened mutiny ever since they left Egypt. If anyone needed proof of their leader's status as God's emissary, today's passage from Exodus would leave them with little doubt. Moses' shining face alone so bright, so blinding that he must veil it while addressing the people validates his unmistakable closeness, his exclusive intimacy with the High and Holy (and Shining) One who has protected and guided them thus far. Oh, their grumbling will continue, and other golden calves will no doubt tempt them; but after this moment they know that it is only through Moses that they will ever reach their promised land.

I offer this Sunday School lesson only to remind us of the source on which Saint Luke so clearly depended as he came to compose today's gospel episode, the account we call the Transfiguration. The parallels could not be more obvious. A mountain, a cloud, a voice, frightened disciples, blazing and blinding light. And if that's not enough, Moses makes an appearance too, along with the Prophet Elijah! (It's getting pretty crowded up there!)

The difference is that here the shining one is not Moses but Jesus. For here God is not validating a leader's authority but affirming a Savior's calling. Here God is offering as a mediator not a mere mortal, but a divine Son. For Peter, James, and John, for the church that first heard and received this gospel, for the universal Church since, and for this parish church named after that event, for you and for me, the message could not be more clear or more radiant: It is only through God's Son, through Jesus the Christ, that we will find our way home. "Listen to him," the Father tells us. Follow him from mountain to valley, from light into light.

And the voice might have continued: It's true, that way will pass through a wilderness. The valley below will lead to a cross. But the glory that you see now, in the dazzling face and form of my Anointed, my Beloved that glory will remain with you, will sustain you in suffering and in joy, in memory and in practice, through Calvaries of love, until the light of his Resurrection surrounds you; or as the poet of Second Peter declares, 'until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.'

Is it just me, or does it seem that all of life is now waiting for such a rising? Is not all creation now yearning for some new burst of transfigured light, even if it calls it by a different name or envisions it in a different way? We know that for so many, the valleys of sorrow and uncertainty must appear finally too deep and too long; the image of that mountain, the memory of that glory (if it ever existed) must feel more like a distant dream than a shining reality. And we know too that some of these same anxieties and doubts are also our own.

Yet the truth is, this feast day and the promise it holds was made, I believe, for days and times such as ours, for just such moments of struggle and challenge. Jesus doesn't take his disciples up the mountain to dazzle them, but to reassure them. He isn't just showing off! The light emanating from his face and clothes is not meant to frighten (though it does!), but rather to imbue and penetrate, to fill their frightened souls with confidence and courage. It's meant to prepare them for Calvary by giving them a taste of Easter. It's meant to instill hope, to give light to their future a light that by his life and his sacrifice they now possess.

As we do too; we who know how the story ends. Having ourselves been to the mountain, having ourselves all these years borne that Resurrection light, or have tried to, let us bear it anew beginning today. At a time when it's most needed, let our unveiled radiance, like our love, once again embrace the world. Amen.

Blessings,  
Fr. Gordon+