

Lights! Bright Cloud! A Voice!
Matthew 17:1-9

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This Sunday is the Transfiguration of our Lord, as it is recorded in Matthew's Gospel. What is the purpose of this event? It is a glimpse and foretaste of eternal joy, glory, and blessedness. It is a declaration of the Divinity of Jesus which all will see on the last day.

The events of our text come six days after Jesus had told the disciples that He would suffer many things at the hands of the chief priests and scribes, would be killed, and on the third day rise. On that day, Peter had rebuked Jesus, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." Jesus then turned to him and said, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men."

Of course, Peter was probably speaking what was on the minds of all the disciples.

After that interchange, Jesus goes on to explain to the disciples, that the life of those who follow him is also cruciform. "If any would come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me... And that those who would save their life, will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Jesus has grounded His teaching in the promise that He, the Son of Man, is about to come in power and glory to judge all mankind. Now it is six days later, and Jesus has Peter and two others with him when he is transfigured.

As I thought about this text, I could not help but think about what takes place on the set while filming a movie, or even commercials. I picture the black and white clap-board with the number of takes printed on it, and the director saying, "Lights! Camera! Action!"

As I look at today's Gospel, I cannot help but seeing that sort of thing taking place twice in the events of our text.

Jesus is transfigured, He takes on a radiance and glory that is almost blinding, as He Himself is the light. Then Moses and Elijah show up and talk with Jesus, as Luke tells us, "speaking of His departure, which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem." In other words, they were talking about what Moses and Elijah had prophesied He would suffer at the hands of the chief priests and scribes, would be killed, and on the third day rise. Lights – Jesus transfigured! Camera – Moses and Elijah, a glimpse from the past! And Peter wants to act – to put up three tents so that they can stay there!

Peter likes this whole glory thing. Moses the law-giver is there, the one who brought them out of Egypt, the one through whom God instituted the Passover. Elijah is there, the greatest of the prophets, another piece of Jewish history, the one who took on 450 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel to see which God would answer and burn up the offered sacrifices. Of course, the Baal did not answer, nor could he answer – and the only true God answered and burned up the sacrifice soaked in water.

But Peter is interrupted when the bright cloud overshadows them (a second great light), and a voice speaks, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him." Immediately the disciples fell prostrate on the ground.

Peter was talking when the cloud came and the voice spoke, interrupting him. Peter had already said something foolish when He rebuked Jesus. Now, as Peter again has his mouth open, the Father interrupts him. It is almost as if God is saying, "Peter, shut-up and listen to My Son." Yes, I know, you are not supposed to say the word shut-up, but it fits.

Peter is speaking foolishly. Peter, having already been rebuked for not wanting Jesus to talk about His coming suffering and death, is still trying to avoid that. If three tents are erected so that Jesus, Moses, and Elijah can stay here on this mountaintop, maybe that suffering and death won't happen – the suffering and death that they were discussing, which Peter must have heard..

Although Jesus was transfigured there before him, Peter did not get it? It was like it went, “Lights, camera, action! CUT!!! Peter, did you hear the directions? Listen! OK, let's start again.” You can almost see the director having a number two written on the clapboard, the brilliant light of the bright cloud, the voice from heaven, and all three disciples fall on their faces.

Before the glory can remain permanent, something else needs to happen. Jesus is talking with Moses and Elijah because they had prophesied about Jesus, they had spoken of God's Anointed One coming to fulfill the Law and the prophets. And Jesus was going to accomplish that with what was soon to take place in Jerusalem.

Yes, the glory of God is resplendently evident in the glorious radiance with which Jesus is transfigured. However, the discussion with Moses and Elijah about what He is going to accomplish in Jerusalem proclaims that He has strange and terrible work to do – He is going to the cross – He is going to suffer and die, just as He proclaimed. But He will also be raised on the third day.

In the events that our Gospel records for us, Peter, James, and John learn intimately that God's glory, and the suffering of the cross, are not somehow exclusive. In fact, the only way for Peter to get His wish – the only way this glory he is enjoying can continue – is through the suffering and death of Christ that he did not want to happen only a few days earlier.

Let's face, we're there with Peter. Who wants a dear friend and beloved teacher to die? Even more, who wants to take up a cross and follow Jesus? Who wants to have to lose their life in order to find it? I know that I do not want to do either! But that is what Jesus says we must do.

And even more, that is what the voice from the bright cloud – God the Father – instructs should and must happen.

What is your cross? What is Satan using to get you to give up on God and turn away from Him? Is it illness? Is it the unexpected death of a loved one? Is it a hard teaching of Scripture that the world disagrees with, and which to our thinking doesn't make a whole lot of sense? Is our cross the fact that we must stand firm on something the world doesn't like? Is our cross that the fact that we need to be truthful to a family member, even though it will hurt them – but we are either truthful with them or we are unfaithful to God?

Why are there such crosses in our lives? Sinfulness! That is the answer, very simply put. Peter, James, and John know that sinfulness is the problem. When they see the bright cloud and hear God's voice, they fall down in fear – theirs is a response fully aware of the fact that some of their crosses are of their own creating. How many of us are just like them, wanting our own way instead of God's way? So, at the very obvious presence of the glory of God – with the lights, the bright cloud, and the voice, they respond as all people will when faced with God present in a way we cannot understand, with repentance.

Lights! Camera! Action! From the bright cloud the Father said, “Hear Him!”

Jesus proclaims, "Rise, and have no fear."

Dear friends, that cross we are afraid to carry, Christ has already carried. Your terror of it – your sinfulness – is forgiven. The very Son of God is that living Word which comes to you, He speaks to you and the reality of His

Word overshadows you. On the cross of Calvary, the blood of the Son was shed, it is poured out upon your mind and heart as He speaks to you today, and you are cleansed of all sin and your fear is removed.

Hear Him! Says the Father. Jesus speaks, "Rise, and have no fear." "Take eat; this is my body. Drink of it, all of you; this is My blood of the new testament, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." You are transported through time to the cross where the cup is filled, and you eat and drink that which was given and shed for the forgiveness of your sins.

Would you like to ascend God's holy mountain? Would you like to see Jesus in all His glory and tabernacle there with Him in glory for all eternity?

Today you receive a foretaste of that glory as the Son of God speaks to you, sets His table before you, and in Word and meal, gives you eternal life and salvation through the forgiveness of your sins. Amen.