

Closing Prayer

In a bright cloud, O God,
you revealed the glory of your Christ,
and named him as your beloved Son.
As we listen to the Law and the prophets
let your Holy Spirit enlighten us,
that we may truly hear their witness
to the presence among us of the Word made Flesh,
who is one with you and the Holy Spirit,
now and always, for ever and ever.

Celebrating the Christian Year · The Sunday next before Lent, Year A²

The Sunday next before Lent

Principal Service readings

Exodus 24.12-18	Moses beholds the glory of God on the mountain
Psalm 2 or 99	The Lord is the strength of his people / Greatness of the Lord
2 Peter 1.16-21	The Transfiguration; 'until the day dawns ...'
Matthew 17.1-9	The Transfiguration

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The Transfiguration

¹Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' ⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!' ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Get up and do not be afraid.' ⁸And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, 'Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.'

Matthew 17.1-9 NRSV¹

² *Celebrating the Christian year : prayers and resources for Sundays, holy days and festivals, years A, B and C* / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-5.

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

Matthew's source for the story of the transfiguration is Mark 9.2-13. His changes are generally minor, among them, that Peter addresses Jesus as 'Lord', rather than 'rabbi' (17.4), the lengthy description of the disciples' reaction (17.6-7), the characterisation of the experience as a 'vision', and the omission of Mark's suggestions about the fulfillment of scripture (17.11, 12).

The genre of the story is elusive. It doesn't fit as a resurrection story. Matthew calls it a 'vision' (*horama*, 17.9). The content (a preview of Jesus' eventual glorification) and literary features such as the disciples' reaction (17.6-7) suggest that it be called an apocalyptic vision.

Blended into the transfiguration story are features from the theophany (Exodus 24) and the apocalyptic visions of the book of Daniel. The Sinai theophany includes the high mountain, the time 'after six days', the shining of the face of Jesus (see Exodus 34.29), the figure of Moses, and the bright cloud.

As they make their way up to Jerusalem the inner core of disciples (Peter, James and John) are given a vision of who Jesus really is and what he will be in God's kingdom. It is an apocalyptic vision because it anticipates Jesus' future glory.

By straightening out the order to read 'Moses and Elijah', instead of Mark's 'Elijah and Moses' Matthew makes the two figures representative of the law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah). These two figures also carry apocalyptic significance, since there was mystery surrounding their passing and speculation about their future roles.

The story establishes how Jesus came to fulfil the law and the prophets (see 5.17). About Elijah, the conversation concerns the correct interpretation of Malachi 4.5: 'Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.' The Christian interpretation was that the Elijah figure prophesied by Malachi was John the Baptist.

Quotations

1

Jesus is approaching the definitive moment. His death will not put an end to his mission; it has to be read in the light of the resurrection. This is what the so-called episode of the transfiguration invites us to do. Jesus' radiant face and his dazzling white clothes (Mt 17:2) anticipate the paschal light. The Lord's death will not be the triumph of darkness, which is already overcome.

We run the risk of losing the paschal perspective, that is to say, the necessary passage through death. In such a case, the anticipation can be construed as something permanent, as a break, a parenthesis. This explains the enthusiasm of Peter who wants to stay in that place (v. 4). In reality, this anticipation is to serve as an impulse, a way to avoid fear (v. 7), to reinforce faith and to face the difficulties involved in communicating it. The transfiguration experience has to encourage the disciples to follow the Master and not hold them back on the way.

Sharing the Word through the liturgical year / Gustavo Gutiérrez. 1997 [1995]

2

True spiritual love is not a feeble imitation and anticipation of death, but a triumph over death, not a separation of the immortal form from the mortal, of the eternal from the temporal, but a transfiguration of the mortal into the immortal, the acceptance of the temporal into the eternal. False spirituality is a denial of the flesh; true spirituality is the regeneration of the flesh, its salvation, its resurrection from the dead."

The meaning of love / Vladimir Solovyov. 1894

Related topics

For further study:

Transfiguration; conversion; prayer, fasting and almsgiving; call and response; call of baptism; sin' paschal mystery; repentance and reconciliation