

Meditations: The Transfiguration

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on the feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord.

- The Transfiguration, a message of hope
- A glimpse of paradise
- Coming down from Tabor renewed

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SIX DAYS after announcing his death and resurrection to the disciples, our Lord “took with him Peter and James

and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light” (*Mt* 17:1-2). Jesus revealed his glory to the apostles before his Passion “so that they might have the strength to face the scandal of the Cross and understand that many tribulations must be endured to enter the kingdom of God.”^[1] The Transfiguration therefore is a message of hope for the times when the Cross will be present. The sufferings, the small and great setbacks of daily life, are the door that leads us to accompany our Lord in his glory: “Jesus, we want to see you, to speak to you! We want to contemplate you, immersed in the immensity of your beauty, in a contemplation that will never cease! It must be wonderful to see you, Jesus! It must be wonderful to see you and be wounded by your love!”^[2]

Life is a journey towards heaven. And our Lord taught the apostles that, on that journey, suffering is not merely an inevitable stop along the way, a bitter toll that must be paid despite not wanting to. Jesus himself carried the Cross, carried it on his shoulders out of love. He gave himself up to suffering because he wanted to. He shows us that true evil is not so much experiencing suffering, but thinking that we have to go through it alone, or trying to live as though the Cross didn't exist. "Is it not true that as soon as you cease to be afraid of the Cross, of what people call the Cross, when you set your will to accept the Will of God, then you find happiness, and all your worries, all your sufferings, physical or moral, pass away?"^[3] The hope of contemplating Jesus in his glory, as the apostles did at the Transfiguration, will fill us with strength to be able to see the

reflection of his Face in the difficulties of each day.

ON CONTEMPLATING the glory of the Transfiguration, Peter addressed Jesus with joyful words: “Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah” (*Mt 17:4*). Peter experienced a foretaste of paradise, a happiness that went far beyond his own expectations and experiences. Therefore, perhaps as any of us would have done, he wanted that moment to last, not to have it vanish as quickly as it had come, or as quickly as so many other joys in life disappear. But Christ didn’t allow this. He had not made Peter a sharer in the glory of heaven so that he could escape from reality, but so that he would have a guide during the

dark days of the Passion. “Jesus’ beauty does not alienate his disciples from the reality of life, but gives them the strength to follow him all the way to Jerusalem, all the way to the Cross. Christ’s beauty is not alienating. It always brings you forward. It does not make you hide.”^[4] —

We too can experience on earth a foretaste of paradise, moments when we feel Jesus’ presence in an especially clear way, above all in the people we love. In our life of piety, we can also experience times of greater joy. In marital love, in our family, in sincere friendship, or in the effort to improve our world, we can begin to taste some of the hundredfold that God has promised us. And it is only natural that, like Peter, we want these moments to remain forever or to last as long as possible. But our Lord allows these foretaste of heaven not to retain

them at all costs, but to spur us forward. Their memory will give us light for the days of darkness and guide us to a happiness far more lasting than that of the Transfiguration: the glory of eternal life. “A great Love awaits you in Heaven: without betrayal, without deceit. All love, all beauty, all greatness, all knowledge! And it will never cloy: it will satiate, yet you will still want more.”^[5]

SOME OF GOD’S most important manifestations have taken place on mountaintops. We see this in the covenant established with Abraham on Mount Moriah and in the giving of the tablets of the Law to Moses on Sinai. Jesus’ own death also occurred on another hill, Calvary. And for the Transfiguration, the evangelist records that the apostles had to climb

to the top of Mount Tabor (cf. *Mt* 17:1). This ascent invites us “to reflect on the importance of separating ourselves from worldly things in order to make a journey upward and contemplate Jesus. It is a matter of listening attentively and prayerfully to Christ, the beloved Son of the Father, seeking moments of prayer that allow for a docile and joyful acceptance of the Word of God.”^[6] —

In our times of rest, we have an opportunity to disconnect from the rhythm of daily life and listen to the voice of Jesus. With our body and spirit renewed, we can deepen in our relationship with God and those closest to us; we can pray with greater calm and serenity, read the Gospel slowly, spend more time with our family and friends... Then we can come down from the mountain “charged with the power of the divine Spirit, in order to decide on

new steps of conversion and to bear constant witness to charity as the law of daily life. Transformed by Christ's presence and the ardor of his Word, we will be a clear sign of God's life-giving love for all our brothers and sisters.”^[7] —

St. Josemaría said that true rest is not escaping from reality nor simply being idle. Rather “rest means recuperating: to gain strength, form ideals and make plans. In other words it means a change of occupation, so that you can come back later with a new impetus to your daily job.”^[8] — We can ask Mary to help us live these times of rest – whether a number of days or brief moments in our daily lives – with the desire to contemplate Jesus as the apostles did at the Transfiguration.

^[1] — Benedict XVI, Angelus, 17 February 2008.

[2] St. Josemaría, *Holy Rosary*, Fourth Mystery of Light.

[3] St. Josemaría, *Way of the Cross*, Second Station.

[4] Francis, Angelus, 5 March 2023.

[5] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 995.

[6] Francis, Angelus, 6 August 2017.

[7] Ibid.

[8] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 514.

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