

“For he revealed his glory... that the scandal of the Cross might be removed from the hearts of his disciples and that he might show how in the Body of the whole Church is to be fulfilled what so wonderfully shone forth first in its head.” These words are taken from this morning’s preface for this Feast of the Transfiguration, and it situates the feast within the wider context of the Church’s faith. More than a miracle account, it is a profound event with theological significance far beyond an appearance of Jesus, for he had many appearances. No, this was different.

There must be some connection between the Transfiguration and the Resurrection, for at the end of the Gospel, the instructions are clear—say nothing until after the resurrection. When Jesus walked with the strangers on the road to Emmaus, he gave off no brilliant light to tip them off as to his identity. Certainly, a light shone down from heaven for Saul on the roads to Damascus, but that light had no distinct shape.

The light of Tabor however, is a descending light, preceded by the first prediction of Jesus’ impending passion. It was a transformative light, not a blinding one, as it was for Saul. They did not cover their eyes, but rather looked on in amazement and terror.

Some Eastern Church Fathers were of the opinion that the humanness of Jesus was constantly bathed in the light of the Transfiguration from Mount Tabor, even though the disciples did not perceive it day by day. The humanity of Jesus, immersed as it was in day-to-day human dullness, was nonetheless always ready to respond to the will of the Father and was transfigured, as if by an invisible glory, into an ever more profound form of a servant.¹

¹ cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *You Have the Words of Eternal Life: Scripture Mediations*, Ignatius Press p. 97

Pope St. Leo the Great gave a different interpretation as to Jesus' motive, writing that its "foremost object was to remove the offence of the cross from the disciple's heart, and to prevent their faith being disturbed by the humiliation of His voluntary Passion by revealing to them the excellence of His hidden dignity." Jesus, in knowing what they were about to go through, offered them a foretaste lest they lose heart, a sentiment echoed in today's liturgical prayers.

The paradox here is that the light of the Transfiguration shows forth the glory of the Lord just before he suffers the utter depths of his darkness on the Cross. The apostles would only understand this paradox after they had experienced it. Thus, there was no need to share the account now, as it will only be misunderstood.

The disciples were instructed to say nothing until the Son of Man rises from the dead. The Transfiguration is linked with the resurrection because it was a foretaste of the good that was to come.

So too is the Holy Eucharist, the heavenly banquet, seen as a foretaste of the riches of heaven, to those who receive them worthily. Recall the beautiful words of the *Ave Verum Corpus*, the motet composed for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi. The last line reads "Be for us a foretaste of the trial of death."² So even in a beautiful hymn for the Eucharist, we are not shielded from the reality of our call as disciples to bear the Cross.

This magnificent feast can help us to constantly recall the glory of Christ, the heavenly banquet to which we are called, and the glory which awaits those faithful followers of Christ, when one day, with God's mercy and grace we too will be given a glorified body on the last day, to rejoice for all eternity in heaven.

² "Esto nobis praegustatum in mortis examine."