

The Transfiguration¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Tuesday, August 6, 1861

Today the Church celebrates the feast of the Transfiguration. In Rome this is a first class feast, feast of the patriarchal church of St. John Lateran, the Pope's church. We have also celebrated this feast, full of very consoling truths. I will try to explain.

First of all, our Lord took three apostles with him, and led them up a high mountain called Tabor, overlooking the sea. Jesus chose this mountain with its magnificent view of the surrounding area to treat his apostles to an unusual manifestation. Since he wanted to keep this a secret, he chose only a few; others may have talked about it. Our Lord chose three apostles. The first was St. Peter, head of the Church, because he would have much to suffer. Our Lord showed him his glory to console him in his sufferings. The others were St. John, the beloved disciple, and St. James, who would also suffer much and be the first to be martyred in Jerusalem.

Our Lord asked them to pray. They did not know what was coming, since our Lord usually surprises his friends. All four of them were at prayer. St. Luke remarks that while they were praying, *the face of our Lord became brilliant like the sun, and his clothes as white as snow* (cf. Lk 9:29). This was the effect of prayer; he was transfigured in prayer. Moses and Elijah appeared also, but not with the radiance that showed only in our Lord. He spoke to Moses and Elijah about what he must suffer in a few days. The apostles heard it all, and when he had finished speaking, Moses and Elijah went away, hidden from view.

To restrain them, St. Peter, who didn't know what he was saying, said to our Lord: *It is good that we are here; if you want, let us make three tents.* One forgets oneself in contemplation. Our Lord did not respond, because as the writer remarked, St. Peter *did not know what he was saying* (cf. Lk 9:33). While he was still speaking, a cloud covered them. Until then there was no cloud over Tabor. When the apostles saw it, they became frightened. Then they heard the voice of the heavenly Father: *This is my Beloved Son, on whom my favor rests; listen to him.* (Lk 9:35). They were so afraid that they fell to the ground, appearing to be dead, and not daring to speak or stand. Jesus Christ approached them, touched them and said: *Rise, and do not be afraid* (Mt 17:6). He charged them not to tell the vision to anyone until his Resurrection, and the apostles obeyed. This is what transpired at the Transfiguration; now let us see what it teaches us.

The first lesson is the love of solitude and silence. Jesus chose a mountain where no one goes, where one can be alone. It's remarkable how he loved to pray in high places, seemingly saying that if we want to go to heaven we must lift ourselves up. Our forefathers preferred to build churches on mountains. God loves mountains: our Lord chose Mt. Zion for the Cenacle, and the city of Nazareth was built on a mountain.

Our Lord begins to pray with his three apostles. During this common prayer, he is transfigured. Normally, prayer does not transfigure us, but transforms us. Take note that this occurred during prayer. Our Lord simply unveiled the miracle that was hiding him. He did not take on a brilliance from outside, like the brilliance of the sun. He removed the veil over his body and its faculties, and took up the natural state of his union with the Word, with his divinity. We don't know how long the Transfiguration lasted.

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Since the apostles fell asleep in contemplation, we have no idea how long our Lord remained in this state of glory.

My Sisters, this teaches us that **when our body will be glorified**, the glory will come from the very nature of grace, from the grace of Jesus Christ in us. Do you know how the soul will be glorified in heaven? The grace of God will blossom in it, as well as in the body when it will rise in glory. God will not give it any other glory than the one that is more or less sleeping there. But this grace, this principle of resurrection received in baptism, multiplies through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. When our bodies reach heaven, they will carry this grace and will blossom with the glory of God. That is why we show such respect for the bodies of the saints. We carry within us the glory of God, manifested through virtues. Some day, it will be manifested through glory.

Our Lord showed the apostles his beauty so that when they would later see him humbled as the man of sorrows on Calvary, they could remember having seen his glory, and be consoled. In himself he was always the King of glory, but he did not want that glory to shine out. He was so beautiful that the apostles could not look at him directly. He was as bright as the sun that our eyes cannot bear. He was much more beautiful than the sun, much more perfect, since he is the sun of glory. His clothes were as white as snow. Why does our Lord always appear dressed in white? Another evangelist comments, his *clothes became dazzling white as wool, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them* (cf. Mk 9:3). The words used are always “light, whiteness, purity”, because God is purity itself. Purity is whiteness and light. The difference between the saints in heaven is in the degree of light. They go from light into light, and this brightness is related to the purity of their love. Let us then become very holy.

What were Moses and Elijah doing there? Our Lord enjoyed the witness of these prophets, who appeared as servants. Our Lord was in their midst resplendent in glory, because he is truly the Lord of all. When the heavenly Father spoke, Moses and Elijah faded from the scene.

Since our Lord was about to suffer, the heavenly Father affirmed him, lest the faith of the apostles be shaken. Once they had seen the Lord’s glory, God spoke; *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him* (cf. Mt 17:5). The Father expressed this twice – at our Lord’s baptism, when he appeared so humbly (cf. Mt 3:17), and at his glorious transfiguration. Why does he choose occasions that are so different? In the first, he humbles himself to the point of appearing to be a sinner, and is baptized as such. Although the Son is humbling himself, the Father wants to distinguish him from sinners. The Father, on this occasion, does not add: *Listen to him*. On Tabor he does add, *Listen to him*. He is your law-maker, taking precedence over Moses and Elijah. This is my humiliated Son who is as glorious as I am.

The apostles are silent, since they are full of fear. This shows us how Good God is not to show himself in all his glory. The apostles must have been used to seeing miracles; they had seen so many, yet they were still afraid. If the Good Lord appeared in his beauty, in his holiness, we also would be frightened. It is a grace for us not to experience Tabor. Notice that the apostles do not say, We will work, we will humble ourselves for you. Not at all! **The glory of God is passive contemplation.** As soon as they said, *It is good for us to be here*, that was the end! To teach them an important lesson, our Lord spoke of his coming sufferings in Jerusalem, the disgrace he would have to endure, the torment of crucifixion. They were not paying attention. They merely spoke about their feelings, thinking only about their own happiness.

It seems that the grace of God which comes to us like a Tabor on earth is not a grace of sanctification, not at all. The apostles had certainly seen the glory of our Lord, still they were no stronger than the others on the day of trial. St. Peter forgot and denied knowing Jesus; St. John ran away, and so did St. James, along with the rest. The Blessed Virgin had to bring St. John to Calvary, which proves that, whenever

graces of consolation are not seen as an encouragement to work and suffer, these divine graces can make souls weak. I might even say full of self-love.

Our Lord is much greater on Calvary than on Tabor. One might say, If I had seen our Lord on Tabor, I would not have followed the example of the apostles. At the time of trial, we would have acted like them – our Lord has given us so many graces and we have forgotten them!

Why did the cloud surround the apostles? Can't you see a preview of the Eucharist? In a sense, he was preparing them for the Eucharistic cloud. He will be really present, but through a cloud, as the apostles saw him on the mountain. Our Lord told them not to speak about this until he had risen. He is gently teaching us not to speak about what could redound to our honor and glory, not to speak about our good works! The apostles kept their word, since the grace of our Lord was there to help them.

My Sisters, this is a foretaste of heavenly contemplation. It seems that in paradise the struggle will be over. The soul will be so united to our Lord that it will forget everything else. It has to forget everything; what could it desire? When one is with Jesus Christ, one does not miss the goods of the world. The apostles forget everything; they want only to remain on Tabor. In paradise, they will possess Jesus Christ entirely. They will see that he is much more beautiful than on Tabor. I truly believe this. Since human eyes are too weak, our Lord was obliged to temper his glory.

My poor Daughters, the Tabor of contemplation is not very threatening. Our Lord offers it to us in his goodness. His face does not shine like the sun, he is as gentle as love. Our eyes will not be strained; sleep will not overtake us threatened by the weight of his magnificence. Love may very well lead us to say, It is good to be at your feet; but an active love will add, Lord, what must we do to please you? This takes place in silence, in solitude, and in prayer. Our Lord reveals himself, makes himself known to the soul; one must desire him and make oneself worthy. The angels will come, not to distract you from his presence, since they are servants. Clouds will come, but love has its own way to find the one who is loved. Love is union. **Practice this contemplation of love, since it is the best.** It will not leave you lazy or neglectful, because one does not sleep on Tabor. Love is always vigilant.



Point for reflection:

This experience of the glory of the Lord consoles the disciples and readies them for the coming sufferings of the Passion. This meditation includes several points: the Scriptural texts with their lessons, the love of silence and solitude, the transforming effects of grace, strength in the face of suffering, the centrality of Jesus in the history of salvation, and some approaches to contemplation. Develop one of these ideas.