

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church

Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

Glory be to Jesus Christ!

Glory be Forever!



Volume 9 Issue 424

9th Sunday after Pentecost-Feast of the Holy Transfiguration

Sunday, August 2, 2020



Seeing is believing. It is one thing to hear an interesting story or to entertain a bright idea. It is far different, however, to encounter an event or to participate in a situation such that we know its truth and are changed as a result. That is precisely what the apostles Peter, James, and John experienced on Mount Tabor when they

were enabled to behold the divine glory of Jesus Christ, Who shone brightly with light as the voice of the Father identified Him as His beloved Son.

St. Peter writes in today's epistle reading that he did not proclaim "cleverly devised myths" about Christ, for those who beheld the Transfiguration "were eyewitnesses of His majesty." The gospels make clear that the disciples were not looking for a Messiah Who was truly divine, but for a righteous national leader like King David. Peter famously rejected the Lord's prediction of His crucifixion and denied Him three times. He was restored as the chief apostle and went to his death as a martyr, not because he had made up stories about a crucified and risen Lord, but because the Savior had revealed Himself to Peter as truly the Son of God.

(continued p. 3)

The Transfiguration of Christ, by Professor George Mantzaridis

The Transfiguration of the Savior occupies a central position in the Orthodox Church and theology. It is the event that reveals the glory of the Church and of the faithful. It is the evidence of the new situation that entered history through the advent of Christ.

At the Transfiguration, Christ manifested through His human nature the uncreated glory of His Divinity. At the same time, He caught up the men with Him in the uncreated divine glory.

Moses and Elijah share the same brightness as the Lord. The only difference is that Christ is the source, whereas they are the recipients of divine brightness. The reason why Christ was transfigured before his disciples was the approach of the day when he would be crucified: "So that when they see you crucified, they will understand your voluntary passion".

With the Transfiguration, Christ confirms, on the one hand, His divini-

ty, which His disciples had confessed a little earlier, through the mouth of Saint Peter, and, on the other, offers the first evidence of the coming of His kingdom. Celebrating the Transfiguration in August perhaps doesn't help us to remember the direct connection with the Cross of Christ. Only if we recall that, a few weeks later, on September 14, we keep the feast of the Universal Elevation of the Precious Cross, which

(continued p.2)

*****9th Sunday after Pentecost *****

St Herman of Alaska & America

Epistle: 2 Peter 1:10-19

Gospel: Matthew 17: 1-9

St. George Orthodox Christian Church is a community of believers who strive to live a life according to the Gospel of Christ and teachings of the Church.

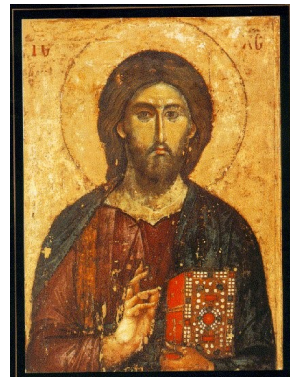
We worship God in Trinity -
Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

We are dedicated to living out Christ's commandment to, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, ad with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*

We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

If you have any questions about the church or would like to speak with our pastor, please call Fr. Matthew at 607-280-1586

Glory be to
Jesus Christ.
Glory be
Forever.





Troparion to St. George

As the deliverer
of captives
and defender
of the poor,
healer of the infirm
and champion of kings,
victorious great
martyr George
intercede with Christ
our God
for our souls
salvation.

News and Notes

We welcome all who are worshiping with us today. Because of COVID-19, our social hour has been canceled until we receive further instructions from the Department of Health.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Lillian, Meg, Larissa, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Lorraine, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Bonnalee, Vicky, Corella, Gail, Mike, Ron, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

St. Sophrony on the Transfiguration

On this solemn feast, in some manner, in our weakness, we are so bold to speak about the inapproachable and never-setting Light that shown on Mount Tabor.

Within the bounds of the earth there is insatiable hunger and unquenchable thirst for the knowledge of God, for our struggle

is to reach the Unapproachable, to behold the Invisible, to come to know Him Who is found beyond any knowledge.

This momentum increases ceaselessly in every person, when the Light of the Godhead is pleased to shine upon them, albeit somewhat dimly in His approach, for therefore to our noetic eyes is revealed in what abyss we remain.

This vision astonishes the whole person, and then the soul does not know rest and cannot find it, until it is freed fully from the darkness in which it is held, until it is filled with the Insatiable Food, until that Light increases in the soul and is united together with it, until Light and soul become one, proclaiming beforehand of our vision of Divine glory.

The Transfiguration of the Lord serves as the firm foundation of our hope for the transformation of our whole life--which now is full of struggle, afflictions, fear--into a life that is incorrupt and God-like. In these, this ascent to the high Mountain of the Transfiguration is linked with great struggle."

The Transfiguration of Christ, (cont'd from p. 1)

which reminds us of Great Friday, do we find the historical link with the feast.

As a historical event, then, the Transfiguration occurred a few weeks before the Passion. In the calendar of feasts of the Church, it would normally have its place a few weeks before Easter, perhaps as many as now separate it from the Elevation of the Precious Cross. And it should not be thought coincidental that, in that place, the Church has chosen to put another feast: that of the theologian of the Light of Tabor, Saint Gregory Palamas. Thus the second Sunday of Great Lent, is dedicated to Saint Gregory Palamas.

It is also characteristic that, in the three synoptic Gospels, the Transfiguration (*Mark 9, 2-8* occurs immediately after a declaration by Christ that "there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God coming in power" (*Mark 9, 1*). Thus, the Transfiguration of Christ, as Patristic Tradition also notes, is a "potential" mani-

festation of the Kingdom of God.

There is a translation problem here. Sometimes the early translators of the Bible (who often "cribbed" from the



Latin rather than translating the Greek) were not aware of Greek idioms and translated literally. It is true that "ἐν δυνάμει" means "in power", but it is used to mean "nascent, burgeoning, foretaste". Given the juxtaposition of Christ's saying with the event of the Transfiguration, it is clear that, as the Fathers interpret it,

the Transfiguration is an "inkling" of the kingdom of heaven.

Through His Transfiguration, Christ confirms and reinforces the faith in His divinity which His disciples have already confessed. At the Transfiguration, Christ did not assume something He didn't have before, but revealed- in the measure that His disciples were able to receive it- the glory He had always had as God/Man. In other words, the glory the disciples saw on Mount Tabor was not a passing phenomenon, but the eternal light of the divine nature of Christ.

This is what the hymnographer of our Church means when he wrote the troparion for the feast: "You were transfigured on the Mountain, Christ our God, showing as much of Your glory to Your disciples as they were able to bear".

The light of the Transfiguration is the Uncreated Light of the Kingdom of Heaven, which entered the world with the advent of Christ. Of course, the Kingdom of Heaven, being with-

(continued p.4, column 2)

And he surely did not understand the full meaning of the Transfiguration when it occurred, as it was not until after the resurrection that Christ “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.” (Lk 24:27) Indeed, the Lord said to Peter, James, and John, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is risen from the dead.” It was only from the perspective of the resurrection, which no one anticipated, that the disciples could understand what it meant for Christ to be the Son of God.

The truth revealed at the Transfiguration may not be conveyed simply in words or ideas. It had to be seen, heard, and experienced in a way that made Peter, James, and John participants as whole persons in the divine glory. The Lord graciously opened the eyes of their souls, filling them with the divine energies such that they could catch a glimpse of His holy majesty. He enabled them to hear the voice of the Father, and like Moses before the Burning Bush, they fell on their faces “and were filled with awe.”

As is shown by the disappearance of Moses and Elijah, He enabled them to see His superiority to the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament. They did not simply have thoughts or feelings about Christ; no, they truly experienced Him from the depths of their souls as the Son of God.

The change that occurred that day was not in the Lord Himself, Who is eternally radiant with the divine glory in a way beyond our comprehension. The change was in the disciples, for Christ opened the eyes of their souls to behold His infinite holiness, to the extent that they were able as human beings. If we observe this feast simply by celebrating the doctrinal teaching of Christ’s divinity or the great mystical experience of the apostles, we will have excluded ourselves from the full meaning of this event.

For as in all feasts of the Church, the point is not simply to look back at what happened long ago. It is, instead, to enter into the eternal truth that is revealed. And on this great day of the Transfiguration, the only appropriate way to celebrate is to cooperate with the gracious divine energies of our Lord so that we also will behold His divine glory. That means that we too must become transfigured through personal union with the Son of God such that His eternal majesty permeates our existence, making us shine brightly like an iron left in the fire.

As with Peter, who rejected the Lord’s prediction of His death and then denied Him three times, we might well prefer another kind of religion with expectations not quite so high. Shining with the uncreated light may be more than we want to pursue. It may be more appealing to follow an imaginary King David in waging war against those we consider our enemies and to set up a social order that rewards those we think are righteous like ourselves. Maybe we would prefer someone pretending to be Moses or Elijah who would provide instructions that we think good people like us can easily follow on how to live differently from those we like to condemn.

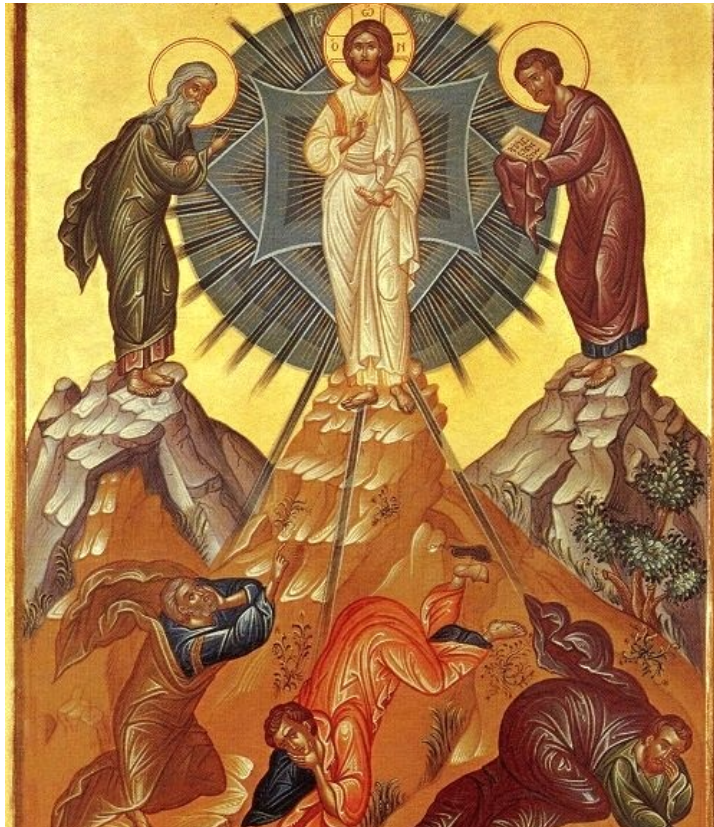
Such sentiments are terrible misinterpretations, of course. These Old Testament saints never pointed to

some easy kind of self-serving religion, but were misinterpreted in first-century Palestine by those who worshiped an earthly kingdom or their own self-righteousness. If we go down that path, we will end up repudiating Christ as surely as did those idolaters. The only fitting way to celebrate the Transfiguration is by embracing as fully as possible the countless opportunities that we have to grow in holiness as we open the eyes of our souls to participate in the glory of God by grace. I have a warning for you, however. If the thought ever occurs to you, “Gosh, I’m becoming really holy now,” pay it no attention at all and instead say the Jesus Prayer or at least focus your mind

on something other than your own deluded thoughts until it goes away.

The more transfigured we are in holiness, the more aware we will be of our sinfulness and the infinite distance between our current spiritual state and the perfection to which our Lord calls us. The path to shining with light begins with a humble, honest acceptance of the darkness in our lives. The path also continues along that route. That is precisely why we need to be transfigured so that we, who are filled with darkness, will become radiant with the brilliant light of the Lord. But we must be prepared: the more you step into His light, the more obvious the spots of darkness will be. The better focused the eyes of our souls are, the more we will be aware of our need for His healing and strength.

(continued p.4)



Homily on the Transfiguration, (cont'd from p.3)

A very common temptation, then, is to give up. Why pray, when our minds wander? Why fast, when we become obsessed with food? Why come to Confession, when we fall right back into our familiar sins? Why try to do anything pleasing to God, when it does not give us what we want? Well, that is the problem. As long as we think about getting the spiritual results that we want on our schedule and in our own way, we will not be transfigured in holiness. We will, instead, remain captive to some form of idolatrous spiritual pride that will blind us to the truth of where stand before the Lord.

If we want to enter into the joy of this great feast of our salvation, we must persistently walk into the light by opening the eyes of our souls to the blinding glory of our Savior. We will often not like what we see in ourselves as a result, but by stumbling forward as best we can, constantly calling out for His mercy, the Lord will change, strengthen, and purify us. In ways that we cannot yet understand, He will make us “a lamp shining in a dark place” that gives light and hope to a world that so desperately needs to be healed by union with His gracious divine energies.

The message of this feast is not to lose heart, but to press on in faithfulness. For the darkness is simply the absence of light and a sign that we have yet more room to embrace the blessed life of Christ. We celebrate the Transfiguration of our Lord already knowing of His resurrection, by which He has illumined even the tomb. Let this sink in: There is no darkness in our souls or in our world that our crucified and risen Lord cannot make radiant with His gracious divine energies.

We must, however, do our part by opening the darkness in our lives to His healing light. Even as we stumble and fall, we must continue to do so with abiding trust in His mercy for blind sinners such as ourselves. For though we do not yet have the eyes to see it, that is how our gracious Lord will make us shine with holy light for our salvation and that of the entire world. Let us join St. Peter, then, in living as “eyewitnesses of His majesty.” For seeing is believing.

To God be the Glory.
Amen.

The Transfiguration of Christ (cont'd from p.2)

out beginning or end, is not confined in time but over-arches it and transfigures it. It doesn't begin with the end of history, but is already present in it and above it and will continue to exist beyond it.

In reality, then, this “coming” advent of the Kingdom of God is nothing more than the manifestation of its “potential”. It's not that something is coming which didn't exist before, but that something is revealed which already existed and will always exist. Just as the Uncreated Light which was revealed to the disciples at the Transfiguration existed from the beginning and remains eternally in the theanthropic hypostasis of Christ, so the Kingdom of Heaven, which came into the world with Christ, is

manifested to the faithful, sometimes, as an inkling of the age to come.

The Christian faith does not depend on any moral principle or ideology, but is founded on the revelation of the Kingdom of God in Christ, in history. St. Peter states, “For we did not follow clever myths when we made known to you the power and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty”.

Without the experience of the celestial, people can never be liberated from the earthly. Christ's apostles, the martyrs, the saints and the ascetics of the Church could not have conquered the world and offered everything to Christ unless they'd had some foretaste of eternal bliss. Adoption in Christ is gained in this present life.

“Now we are children of God” writes Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist, “and it has not

been shown what we shall be. We know that when this happens, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is”.

The Transfiguration of Christ is the preparation for the Cross. And the Cross of Christ is the starting-point of His glory as a person. With His Transfiguration, Christ didn't acquire anything new, but gave his disciples strength before His Crucifixion. The disciples needed to be strengthened so that they could come to terms with the Crucifixion of their Teacher, and with their own cross which they bore later in the name of their Teacher. The gateway to the Kingdom of God is the Cross. And the glory of God in the world begins with the Cross. Every manifestation of the glory of God in history, is a foretaste or extension of the Cross of Christ.

