



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Transfiguration of the Lord - Year A

***Majestic glory***

*Readings: Daniel 7: 9-10, 13-14, Ps 96, 2 Peter 1:16-19, Matthew 17:1-9*

I was listening to the wireless early last week when some new moral enormity was announced by the Government. The media groupies rallied round and predictably gave unstinting support. A tame radical 'Christian' commentator was wheeled in to give the church's blessing to the proposed new order. The argument was simple and unanswerable, she said. Jesus Himself was a very nice chap, thoroughly inclusive and non-judgemental. He would approve. Faced with any modernising proposal He would bathe you in a beatific smile and, like an exhausted babysitter, intone 'Whatever' - the mantra of the careless.

When I had recovered from wondering why the BBC found it nearly impossible to find an orthodox Christian to comment on anything, I began to ask what book this Protestant minister had been reading to come to such a bizarre conclusions. It certainly wasn't the Gospel. But her summary of Jesus, while wholly inaccurate, neatly encapsulates the modern mind's take on the Second Person of the Trinity. Jesus is personally 'fluffy', morally neutral, culturally a little quaint but, on the whole a good person whose legacy has been spoilt by a nasty church. The Jesus spoken of here is a construct of the imagination and one made in the image of the heretical commentator.

This took me back historically to one of the earliest problems that the Church had to deal with, a chap called Marcion. Marcion, an excommunicated son of a bishop, didn't like the Bible very much. He removed the Old Testament, lock, stock and barrel. He didn't like the New Testament a lot and kept only Luke's Gospel from which he edited out the bits he didn't agree with (like the Christmas story). He kept, surprisingly, a few of Paul's letters but again, heavily edited. Marcion had created the god that suited him and today he would be much in demand as the 'go to' commentator on religious issues.

The Bible tells us that Man is made in the image of God. Countless generations of heretics, like Marcion, prefer (like pagans) to make God in the image of Man –usually one man in particular- themselves. Fortunately for us, as Catholics, we enjoy the full complement of the inerrant Word of God in Holy Scripture and two thousand years of the Magisterium, the teaching authority of the Church. Nowhere is that Scriptural Catholicity more clearly demonstrated than in today's Gospel of the Transfiguration.

When our first Pope, St. Peter, recalls this momentous event he speaks of the revelation on the holy mountain as an 'eye witness' of Christ's 'majestic glory'. He does this in the context of warning the young Church against false prophets who will preach a different Jesus and preach lies and licentiousness.

At the moment of the Transfiguration the cavalcade of Jesus and his Disciples is on the road to Jerusalem. They are heading for the encounter on Calvary that will determine the fate of man. Jesus knows this. The disciples don't. In order to help them comprehend the incomprehensible enormity of what is about to happen, Jesus takes the inner core group, Peter, James and John, up into the mountain. They already accept that He is the Messiah. What they

need to know now and hang onto in the dark days ahead is that He is not just human but divine. And they need to understand that He is the long awaited fulfilment of the promise of the salvation of Man.

As Jesus is transfigured, metamorphosed, 'changed from glory into glory', several things become clear.

First we come to see the divine reality of Christ radiating out of the humanity of Jesus. We get a vision of the future, both of the Resurrection Body and of the transcendent glory of Heaven. That simple line in the credal formula, 'Light from light, true God from true God' is exemplified.

Second we are witnesses to the appearance of the most glorious supporting cast. The great Prophet, Elijah, who never died but was swept heavenwards in the great assumption of the Old Testament, stands beside Jesus. Elijah, whose name means 'God alone is God', is the great bearer of the Word of God (which is Jesus) to a disobedient and idolatrous and unfaithful people. Christ fulfils and incarnates the whole prophetic ministry. They are summed up in Him. On the other side of Christ is Moses, the liberator and the Lawgiver. The freedom from sin will be finally given in the Great Passover of Calvary and made available in the Apostolic grant of absolution and the Mystery of the Mass in the life of the Church. The Law, how God wants His people to live, is perfectly revealed in the life of His incarnate Son, Jesus. Here then, on the mountaintop, is the summary of the history of salvation.

Third, they speak of the coming days as 'the Exodus'. The events to come on Calvary will see the Lamb of God, whose blood turns away the Angel of

Death, sacrificed for the liberation of the slaves to sin and the beginning of their long journey to becoming the People of God.

No wonder, for all his fear and trembling, St. Peter wants to stay there on the mountaintop with Jesus and Moses and Elijah. He wants to tabernacle there, to hear the voice of God again and to dwell in this foretaste of Heaven. He, like us, must return to the plain and get on with the tough business of mission and ministry. But he has seen the truth.

This is the real Gospel – not some marshmallow make-believe of modern Marcionism – but one the Apostles were prepared to die for so that we could know the truth and be saved.

For the sake of souls, can we, in our generation, proclaim anything less?

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