

## The Feast for the Transfiguration of our Lord

### Exodus 34:29-35

No wonder that they fell on their faces, Peter and James and John, and were terrified, when they heard the heavenly voice declare of the one they saw before them, shining in glory, that He is the very Son of God.

Not that it really came as a surprise to them that He is. Peter had already confessed it, that: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*. And this he had confessed on behalf of all the Apostles, and they must all have agreed, for Holy Scripture tells us that our Lord Jesus *strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that He was the Christ*, which they would not have been likely to do, anyway, would they, if they did not believe it.

No doubt Peter had made this confession with some trepidation. *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*, those are big words to take in your mouth, are they not? Well, they were.

One can understand why the Apostles would be somewhat uncomfortable around our Lord Jesus. Not only could they never be quite sure what He was going to do or say next; and when they thought they knew, and when they said or did something they thought would be pleasing to Him, so often He would embarrass them and prove them wrong. Knowing that our Lord Jesus is not only *the Christ*, that is: the anointed Saviour sent from God, in accordance with His promise, but even *the Son of the living God*, which means that He is God Himself from eternity, you can understand if that would make them somewhat uncomfortable around Him.

But then, you get somewhat relaxed about even the most terrifying things when you live with them all the time.

Now Peter and James and John were alone with Him on the mountain. And He shone in glory. And Moses and Elijah appeared and talked to Him. One would think that this would be terrifying, also, although it does not seem that they were overly terrified at that. Again, I guess, even the strangest things become less terrifying as you get used to seeing strange things happen.

It seems that it was even *enjoyable* for Peter and James and John to see our Lord Jesus shine in glory; well, to Peter it was. *Lord, it is good that we are here*, he said, and offered to make tents for the three holy ones so that he and James and John could stay with them, there, always, on the mountain. And once again, as so often before, and after, Peter was wrong when trying to please His Master.

A bright cloud overshadowed them, as God would usually appear veiled in a cloud, when He would appear, and a voice from the cloud, which would have to be the very voice of God, said: *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; hear Him!* And they fell on their faces and were terrified.

*It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*, writes the Letter to the Hebrews. And obviously it must be, for all who have any sense of who God is, and who we sinners are, with our faults and flaws and failures.

But then, we do get more relaxed about even the most terrifying things, do we not, as we get used to them.

In the worship of His Church, our Lord Jesus Himself is present and gives Himself to us with all that He is and all that is His. As His Christians, we know this from Holy Scripture, and so we must believe it, if we care about what Holy Scripture teaches; that *God gave Him as Head over all things to the Church*, as the holy Apostle Paul writes it, so that the Church really is *His body and His fullness, who fills all in all*.

And yet, so easily Christians become relaxed and casual about even this glorious reality. How can you stay excited about something that happens every Sunday? You need something else to be excited about Church, something more entertaining and, well, exciting. So you lose interest in the worship of the faithful Church of Christ, which is worship of *Him* rather than of ourselves, and long for more *lively* worship, as the world calls worship that does not have the life of God in it, since it is not concerned with the realities of God, but rather aims to appeal to that in us which Holy Scripture calls *the flesh*, that is: to sinful human nature.

Or that which happens in Church, that our Lord Jesus comes to His Christians with salvation, it comes to no longer be something that happens *every Sunday*, not *for you*. You no longer care to come and be with your Saviour and have His salvation given to you each and every Sunday. Why would you? If I am not excited about it, or it does not make me *feel good*, it is not important, is it? In fact, if I am not excited about, or it does not make me *feel good*, then it cannot *be* any good, can it? And eventually, it becomes each and every Sunday that you make the choice *not* to be with your Saviour, not to have His salvation given to you.

There, though, on the mountain, Peter and John and James heard the very voice of God in a such manner that there was no doubt that it was exactly *that* they heard, the very voice of God. And they fell on their faces and were terrified. For *it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*.

In our Old Testament reading, we hear how the people of Israel had a similar experience with being confronted with the glory of God, and this even though they were so only indirectly. Moses had been in the presence of the glory of God on the mountain and received from Him the two tablets of the Testimony. Now, this was a different mountain, but that is beside the point. And as Moses came down from the mountain, the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. *And Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him.* Nevertheless, Moses spoke to them and commanded them all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai while the glory of God was still shining from him; for it is but right, when the people of God receive His Word, that they do so with fearful awe and reverence, acknowledging the majesty of God, that His glory is something other than that which pleases *the flesh*, that the glory of His goodness is a ferocious fire against all sin and all shortcomings of sinners, and that as such, sinners should not be too casual before Him.

*And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face,* Holy Scripture then says, to shield the people from the dread of seeing the glory of God too clearly. *And whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with Him, he would remove the veil until he came out. Yes, for when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining.*

The glory of God is not for sinners to see. Even when Moses pleaded with God to be allowed to see His glory, He was allowed to see Him only from behind. And for the people, even to see the glory of God indirectly, reflected from Moses, even that was too much.

As the Church of Christ, and as His Christians, we do not see God in His glory, not directly. And that is a good thing. For it would be a fearful thing for us sinners to be confronted with the fullness of the goodness and glory of God. We see His glory only in Christ, and only in faith, by means of His Word of His love and what His love has done for us. *The Word became flesh, as Holy Scripture says it, and set up His Tabernacle among us, that is: His tent and sanctuary, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Christ is Himself the veil that shields us from the holiness of God. The Son of God has come to us, and comes to us, to shield us from His own judgement against all evil and ungodliness of ours.

He has come into our world as one of us, and lived for us the life that we owe it to God to live, in full and complete love for Him, and trust, and obedience, and submission to His will, even to the point of death, and death upon a cross at that, cursed and condemned by God for us, in our stead and on our behalf, and has thus borne Himself His judgement for our failure to live that life ourselves. And this He did for us, for our salvation, out of His love for the Father, and for us. God Himself has become our shield against His holiness and His just judgement against all our sins and shortcomings, against eternal death and damnation and Hell.

And this is pleasing to God. *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased!*, as the heavenly voice declared it there, on the mountain, and had declared it, also, when the Son of God had had Himself baptised with us sinners, and baptised into our sin; and as God demonstrated it when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, as the holy Apostle Paul writes it, and gave Him as Head over all things to the Church which is His body and His fullness who fills all in all.

He is the Head of the Church, which in Biblical language means that He gives life to His Church and fills her with His own eternal life, His fullness of life. And He does this in the Word and worship of His salvation, which is the worship of His faithful Church, and which is the truly lively worship, filled as it is with Himself and His own life.

*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*, the heavenly voice declared, there, on the mountain; *hear Him!* For that is what is pleasing to God: that we hear the Word of Christ, and embrace His salvation; not that we make temporary dwellings for ourselves where it feels good to be. Writes the holy Apostle Paul writes it: *For whoever sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.*

In that which is pleasing to the flesh, that which is exciting and entertaining and makes us feel good, and feel good about ourselves and our own goodness and godliness, in that it is only our own glory we will find, since it was only our own glory we sought. And before the glory of God our own glory is no glory at all; whereas, in the Word and worship of His salvation, our Lord Jesus gives Himself to us, and His heavenly life. In His Word and worship we see His glory, in faith, the glory the only-begotten Son has received from the Father, which is that of being our Saviour.

Glory be to God on High, and on earth peace, good will toward men! Amen.