

**Let the Lord Make His Face Shine on You. (Mat 17:1-9)**

\* Even a brief look at the universe fills our imaginations with awe on the matter of its complexity, magnificence and power. For instance, according to what the scientists say regarding the existent energy in the universe, it is beyond all words when we reflect on the amount of energy released during a millisecond by the countless celestial objects. Here we conclude that it is beyond our mental ability to fit the data into physical categories. However, our concern is not about phenomenon but about God who is the cause and effect of this phenomenon. We've heard and believed that the Almighty called into existence the material realm we are living in. And as much as we are wisely concerned about the Creator of all things, we long for knowledge of His personality; what does He, who is so powerful and intelligent, look like? or What does the Omnipotent think about His little ones? Friends, we couldn't find the answers apart from Scripture because these questions relate to the sphere of God's revelation about Himself. According to what we've learned from the Book, it says that in the beginning God spoke to us through his Son, Jesus Christ, *whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds*, ( Heb 1:2). Unlike the common imagery about God as an impersonal Spirit and faceless power of the universe, we imagine Him as a Person having much love and compassion, yet sustaining the world without end by his power and intellect.

\* Recently, I looked through the collection of items displayed by the British Museum on the Internet. There I've seen a bronze figure of the Canaanite god Baal dated around 700 BC. It is shown as a warrior with horns, lightning in the right hand and a club of thunder in the left. It has a frightened face along with the militant gesture. I read the witness of a traveler who has been in China. He told how one time driving at night he was shocked when looking out through the window he saw a row of Chinese gods under the moon. He said, their faces were hideous and terrifying. I also saw the images of the pagan gods pictured with horns, long hair, suspicious eyes, fangs, and etc. Under those images, we recognize the devious characters willing to subject people to fear and force them to worship them.

\* Going back to our God in the flesh, we've seen absolutely different images. The Scripture says, Jesus' followers who have heard his voice and have seen him were much impressed and amazed by his deeds and his man like appearance, ( Mar 9:15). Reflecting on the gospel narratives, the painters of all the centuries after Christ drew a vast number of pictures and icons on Jesus' account. Despite the fact that none of those reproductions reveal the genuine image of Jesus, if don't believe the Abgar's and the Veronica's legends, all of them have something in common. Some painting show Jesus' face with his dignity, serenity and nobility; the others show him as a suffering Savior with the crown of thorns.

The people of arts have done their best in represent Christ; but in spite of their talents and technique, they cannot produce a picture of man whose beauty comes from the internal state of his blameless soul.

\* Apart the works of arts, we have some verbal portraits of Jesus. The famous one is the 4<sup>th</sup> century manuscript. It seems like a report send from Palestine to the Roman Senate by the official named Publius Lentulus. It is as follows: "In this time appeared a man, who lives till now, a man endowed with great powers. Men call him a great prophet; his own disciples term Him the Son of God. His name is Jesus Christ. He restores the dead to life, and cures the sick of all manner of diseases. This man is of noble and well-proportioned stature, with a face full of kindness and yet firmness, so that the beholders both love Him and fear Him. His hair is of the color of wine, and golden at the root; straight, and without lustre, but from the level of the ears curling and glossy, and divided down the centre after the fashion of the Nazarenes. His forehead is even and smooth, his face without wrinkle or blemish, and glowing with delicate bloom. His countenance is frank and kind. Nose and mouth are in no way faulty. His beard is full, of the same hazel color as his hair, not long, but forked. His eyes are blue, and extremely brilliant. In reproof and rebuke he is formidable; in exhortation and teaching, gentle and amiable. He has never been seen to laugh, but oftentimes to weep. His body is tall and erect; his hands and limbs beautiful and straight. In speaking he is deliberate and grave, and little given to loquacity." And it concludes, "In beauty he surpasses the children of men."

\* Trying to find the Scriptural portrait of Jesus' facial expression such as the color and shape of his eyes, his lips, nose, his hairs, beard and stature, we've discovered nothing except where the Synoptic narrate Jesus' transfiguration. All three gospels say that on a certain day Jesus led Peter, James and John up a mountain. There *he was transfigured before them* from the man they knew into a brilliant figure, say Matthew and Mark, (Mat 17:2; Mr 9:2-3). But the parallel passage from Luke instead of the word *transfigured* says, *the appearance of his face changed*, (Luk 9:29). Then, Matthew and Mark say that *his face shone as the sun*, ... . Reflecting on these passages, it is not enough information to draw Jesus' portrait, even if we would be very skillful painters. Then, is it right to be indignant because the apostles and evangelists didn't tell us anything on Jesus' appearance? Actually, a genuine painter as well as a writer will try to draw two images; first, on paper and second, in the mental world of a reader/spectator. Both, the writer and the painter, meet their goal in one place – that is in our hearts. Therefore, it is not necessary to have a physical portrait of Jesus in order to love and trust him; the evangelists won our hearts drawing the inner image of our Saviour by means of words.

\* According to the common belief, a human face is a mirror of the state of soul. If there is no a mask over our faces they show the inmost condition of our hearts.

In fact, the evil heart of a man can be seen on a man's face, or the kind heart, and any hearts can be seen on people's faces. As usual, hypocrites hide their real beings under the kindly-smile-mask. But it is another topic. Today we focus on Jesus' face, that is says, *the appearance of his face changed*, (Luk 9:29). The image of a humble servant of the Lord was taken off for awhile, and he had been seen as he was, the true God and eternal life, (1Jn 5:20). Then Moses and Elijah appeared before him, and a voice from a radiant cloud came down, *This is my Son, the beloved; with him I am well pleased*, (Mat 17:5; 2 Pet 1:16). *When the disciples heard it, they fell facedown and were terrified*, (Mat 17:6). It was a proper reaction of the sinful flesh upon seeing and hearing God. When Jesus Christ judges the world, He will show His unveiled face to the whole world; in that effect the earth and the heaven will flee away. And there will be found no place for them, (Re.20:11).

\* Friends, God's Son came to the world not only to suffer on the cross for our sins but also to change our frightened faces! Instead, he wants our faces to shine with kindness, dignity and serenity. Can you believe this? The process of change began when we were baptized in water and by the Spirit. The Spirit of Jesus conveys the brightness of his face to us. His glorious image gradually changes us from glory to glory as it is written, *And we all, with unveiled faces reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, which is from the Lord, who is the Spirit*, (2Co 3:18).

\* Thinking over what has been told, we recall the strong affirmation - Jesus is the Son of God, through whom all things were made. Once he was seen as he was, the glorious God; once he will be seen again and never seized from the sign of his people; in the past they looked for his face and it was found; once and for all their faces will shine as his, one nation under the head of the Almighty God, whose kingdom has no end.

Amen.

Beloved, let the Holy Spirit and the Word of God preserve our mind and hearts in Christ Jesus.

Amen.