

Like He Is (Mar 9:2-9)

* Today is the last Sunday after Epiphany. All together there are seven Sundays that are "framed" between the Baptism of our Lord and His Transfiguration. If we take time to overlook Jesus' Baptism you will find a significant difference in the account of what the Father said at the Jordan River and what He said on the Holy Mountain during Jesus' Transfiguration. In connection with Baptism the Father spoke to his Son and in connection with the Transfiguration He spoke to the disciples. In Baptism the Father declares his fatherhood and expresses his love to Jesus, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased," (Mar 1:11). On the transfiguration account the Father points to Jesus as the one whom he highly favors, whom the disciples are commanded to listen to, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." (Mar 9:7). By this, God expresses his love to the disciples.

* Friends, between these two significant occurrences the Synoptic Gospels narrate around two and half years of Jesus' ministry to the poor. During this period he was baptized, empowered by the Holy Spirit; in the wilderness he defeated the Tempter; he preached the Kingdom, made the disciples, healed people from their diseases, cast out demons, demonstrated his power over nature, fed thousands. and finally he showed himself in the newest, ever known state of human appearances. Wow! And what is the point?, you may ask. The point is here, in the Father's words, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Thereby the Epiphany Season builds the image of the Son of God, whose existence will never cease, whom the Father highly favored with the power and wisdom, whom he loves, whom he transformed into the source of the brilliance of lightning and whom we are commanded to listen to! Furthermore, the Transfiguration itself is the God's act of love toward his people!

* Posting the Transfiguration in the end of the Epiphany Season the church's fathers intended to see its significance in the light of the final glorification of the Son that will take place in the end of the ages. But in order to gain the eternal bodies for those who will believe, Jesus bore our transgressions from his Baptism up to his death on the cross, the place of another 'transfiguration.' The Gospels with one accord witness regarding the torment and crucifixion. Torture made changes in Jesus' appearances; they produced dissymmetry on his face and discoloration on his skin caused by the blows. It's what (Isaiah 53:2) says, "... he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him." With some kind of presupposition we can say that the cross became a place where Jesus experienced another 'transfiguration.' There is a huge difference between glorious and mortified Transfigurations. But could you believe?, both of them express God's love to his people.

At the last day we will be surprised with a vision of the King of all glory. Significantly, this glory will shine brighter in the light of the alternative transfiguration on the cross. Christ's glory as the beloved Son of the Father shall never strip the darkness of his suffering and death! Sending Jesus to the cross as the specific way by which God reveals his love to his people, cannot be comprehended in its fullness. Yet, when Jesus will appear in all his glory, we will notice the brands on his palms and feet; the two transfigurations will recall God's love to his people.

* Our lectionary suggests reading (2 King 2:1-12) as a supplement to what we learned of the account of Jesus' Transfiguration. This narrative not only provides the story, it also carries the meaning. Elisha's persistence in disobedience needs to be understood in the positive sense as one who has been tested. Thus Elijah told Elisha, "Stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As certainly as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel." Three times Elijah asked Elisha to leave him alone but the disciple refused. Certainly it was a test. Passing all these tests successfully Elisha asked for reward. But Elisha's reaction surprises many, including his teacher. "Please," said Elisha, "let me inherit a double share of your spirit." "You have asked a hard thing," was response. Nevertheless "...if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." It was the test of Elisha's faith and because of such faith, God made him the great prophet after Elijah.

* Returning back to our Gospel reading the question arises, Were James', John's and Peter's faith tested as well as Elisha's? No, it wasn't. Rather the confirmation was given plainly and naturally; so the disciples' eyes could see and their ears could hear that Jesus is the Son of God, their Saviour. The vision of exalted Teacher was performed in order to fasten the disciple's faith against the upcoming temptations. Seeing the whipped, mocked and hanged on a cross their Master and yet, keeping on him faith and hope that was the purpose of the Transfiguration! Hearing the Father's voice, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him" was also done in order to strengthen the disciples' faith. It proves that God cares for his people. The Father doesn't want anybody dead in virtue of his loving nature. He wants everybody to come in the point of knowledge of truth, (1Ti 2:4) that our salvation is available only if we listen to, believe in and follow to Jesus.

* Reflecting upon our busy lives and the Father's love toward Jesus we cannot escape a question. Does the Father love us too? Yes, He does! Moreover, He loves us unflinching. For example my experiences and Scripture speak loud regarding this truth. You can find many examples of God's

unconditional love from my life-experienced that I preach to you, and from Scripture, (Joh 3:16;13:1;15:9,12; 17:24,26; Rom 9:13; Eph 2:4;5:2,25; Heb 1:9, 2Pet 2:15; 1Jn 4:10,11,19; Rev 3:9). See how Jesus love us as he prayed to the Father, “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me,” (Joh 17:23).

* The difference between the true believers and the false is that that the faithful are given not only to believe in the written Word but also participate in Jesus’ Transfigurations. The Greek word for ‘transfiguration’ is ‘metamorphosis’-- transformation, changed of form. The epistle text for today says, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another...” As the disciples of Jesus Christ we already have been changed by God, beginning with Holy Baptism. Now we are in the state of progressive transformation. For example, when I think something over my past it brings me a sense of shame. It proves me that I am changing. In Russia I saw many Christians who stopped to do shameful things. We shouldn’t reject the fact that from inside we are already transformed into righteous image of the children of God, and in future our physical body will be transformed as well, and we will be "like him," (1 John 3:2). This is what the Father wants. It proves God’s love to his people.

* Now, while we’re in this world, we’re expected to demonstrate the faithfulness to Jesus Christ following the Father’s commandment, ".... listen to him." And here is the important thing you need to hear. Remember, your transformation begins with your willingness to associate with Christ in his death. Likewise Paul says, “I want to know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming conformed to him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead,” (Php 3:10,11). Many people like the idea of sharing in Christ's glory; not many like the idea of sharing in his suffering and death. But sharing in his suffering and death is a prerequisite for sharing in his resurrection and glory! Please understand, you’re not asked to suffer on the Cross in order to be saved but you’re asked to love each other even when we’re not loved. Sometimes it is painful but it will reward us with understanding of Jesus’ cross and growing in thankfulness to the Father. The Father did everything perfectly making us able to transform into the glory of his beloved Son; just listen and follow to Jesus.

Beloved, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.