

August 6, 2023
Feast of the Transfiguration
Matthew 17:1-9

Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and do not be afraid." And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone. As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, "Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Background:

This is a familiar Gospel. The Transfiguration is recorded in all three synoptic Gospels, Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-8, and Luke 9:28-36, and one of these is used as the Gospel text each year for the second Sunday of Lent. In addition, in the years when the Feast of the Transfiguration, August 6, falls on a Sunday, the readings for the feast replace the readings of the Ordinary Time. The fact that the Church asks us to reflect on the transfiguration accounts signals how important this event is for us.

Throughout his Gospel, Matthew presents Jesus as a Moses-like figure. Here, like Moses, Jesus goes "up a high mountain" and encounters the presence of God. Like with Moses, the face of Jesus become radiant, and the presence of God comes from a cloud. "As Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the commandments in his hands, he did not know that the skin of his face had become radiant while he conversed with the Lord (Exodus 35:29)." As Matthew describes the transfiguration, not only does Jesus' face become white, but his face becomes like the sun, and his garments turn white as light. Moses and Elijah appear conversing with Jesus, but their appearance is not changed.

The presence of each of the other figures in the account helps point to the superiority of Jesus. Jesus is seen conversing with Moses and Elijah. These two men represent the two pillars of the Jewish faith, the law and the prophets. As Matthew unfolds the event, it is only about Jesus that the voice from heaven speaks, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." At the end of the event, Jesus is left alone with his disciples to descend the mountain.

In a different way, the presence of Peter, James, and John signals the single importance of Jesus. First, their presence gives witness to the reality of the event. In addition, their response is the familiar response of humans when they recognize that they are in the presence of God: awe and fear. At first, Peter suggests that they build tents so that they can stay in this place. Then, when they hear the voice of God, they fall to the ground in fear. Jesus responds to them like he will after the resurrection, with gentle presence, and by urging them not to be afraid.

Reflection Questions:

1. Has there been a time when you became aware that you were in the presence of God in some special way? What was your response to that realization?
2. By the time the Gospels were written, the early Christians had been waiting for Jesus' return for decades. Do you have hopes or things that you have prayed for decades? Does this Gospel speak to you and your hopes in some way?
3. Do you also have experiences of God being present to you after long waiting?

4. In the Gospel text, God speaks from a cloud telling the disciples to listen to Jesus. Is there any teaching of Jesus that you have found particularly meaningful? Is there any teaching that you have found particularly challenging? Is there any teaching that you chose to ignore?
5. The disciples are described as wanting to stay right where they were. Have you experienced a place in your relationship with God where you would like to have continued? (Perhaps a moment in prayer, a special retreat, an experience of nature, or with another person.)
6. Can you take some time with God to talk about what the Transfiguration means to you in your life situation today?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the Readings for August 6, 2023, the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord

As I watched: Thrones were set up and the Ancient One took his throne. His clothing was bright as snow, and the hair on his head as white as wool; his throne was flames of fire, with wheels of burning fire. A surging stream of fire flowed out from where he sat; Thousands upon thousands were ministering to him, and myriads upon myriads attended him. The court was convened and the books were opened. As the visions during the night continued, I saw One like a Son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven. When he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, the one like a Son of man received dominion, glory, and kingship; all peoples, nations, and languages serve him. His everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed.

The Lord is king, the Most High over all the earth.

The Lord is king; let the earth rejoice; let the many islands be glad.

Clouds and darkness are round about him, justice and judgment are the foundation of his throne.

The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth.

The heavens proclaim his justice, and all peoples see his glory.

Because you, O Lord, are the Most High over all the earth, exalted far above all gods.

Beloved: We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that unique declaration came to him

from the majestic glory, "This is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased."
We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain.
Moreover, we possess the prophetic message that is altogether reliable. You will do well to be attentive to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Jesus took Peter, James, and his brother, John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.
He was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light.
And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him.
Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Lord, it is good that we are here.
If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."
While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them,
then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased;
listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid.
But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and do not be afraid."
And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone.
As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them,
"Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Excerpts from Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; Psalm 97:1-2, 5-6, 9; 2 Peter 1:16-19; and Matthew 17:1-9

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for August 6th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. This is the feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord. The Gospel from Matthew starts with Jesus going up a mountain with Peter, James, and John, and being transfigured before them, his face shining, and his clothes white as light. Then Moses and Elijah appear, conversing with him. From a cloud, a voice says, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

The other readings also have references to the transfiguration event, mountains and clouds, and seeing God's glory, and attending to him. In the first reading, Daniel records what he saw in a dream: "The Ancient One's clothing was bright as snow. I saw One like a Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven; When he was presented before the Ancient One, the one like a Son of man received dominion, glory, and kingship; all peoples serve him." Psalm 97 proclaims, "Clouds are round about him; mountains melt like wax before the Lord; all peoples see his glory." In the second reading, from his second letter, Peter retells of being there when it happened: "That unique declaration came to him from the majestic glory, 'This is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain."

For the last three weeks our Gospels have covered seven parables, all from Matthew's chapter 13. This week is the beginning of a change of pace from the parables. This week the feast of the Transfiguration, with its Gospel from chapter 17, takes the place of the ordinary 18th Sunday in Ordinary time, where in the Gospel Jesus feeds 5000. Next week, when we return to ordinary time, the Gospel will pick up further into chapter 14, after the feeding of the crowd, with Jesus walking on the water to the disciples in the boat, and calming the storm.

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!

*Be attentive to the prophetic message,
as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until day dawns
and the morning star rises in your hearts.*

2 Peter 1:19