

Opening the Word: Luminosity of Love

✘ Spiritual theologians often have cautioned Christians about relying on visions. St. John of the Cross warned his readers that rather than expect a euphoric encounter with Christ, the one who adores God should ask for nothing more than the emptiness of the cross. For it is there, often in radical absence, that we meet the risen Lord.

How do we square this caution with the Gospel of the Transfiguration, read each year on the Second Sunday of Lent? Jesus appears, transfigured in glory, on Mount Tabor. For a moment, the disciples see Jesus for who he is: the splendor of the Father, the Word made flesh. He stands between Moses and Elijah, both who beheld at least a glimpse of God's glory. And now Peter, John and James are invited to see this glory.

But they're asleep. There, with God's glory become manifest, the first apostles slept. Deeply. Who knows how long they slept before, at last, they rose from their slumber?

They rise just in time to hear the voice of the Father, to discover that Jesus is the chosen and beloved one of God. And in this revelation, the glory disappears. Jesus is alone. And the apostolic threesome remain silent before what they perceived.

Second Sunday of Lent – March 17, 2019
PS 27:1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14
PHIL 3:17–4:1
OR PHIL 3:20–4:1
LK 9:28B-36

The reading from Genesis provides a lens for interpreting the experience of the apostles. Abram also encounters divine glory as he receives the great promise of many descendants. In a

scene taken from a dream, Abram offers a sacrifice, then walks in terrifying darkness through the bloody animals.

In the midst of this darkness, God speaks. He promises the gift of land, the gift of a relationship that would transcend Abram's death. God promises the gift of presence, a "thereness" that can be relied on even when God seems absent. God appears in the darkness, in the bloody sacrifice of beasts.

The apostles are given a vision of Jesus in the Transfiguration not because he seeks to offer them a moment of respite from the darkness that often accompanies human life. After all, as soon as the vision of glory fades away, they must wonder if they ever saw such glory in the first place. Was this scene not just the part of a dream? They were sleeping after all!

In fact, Jesus bestows them this vision of glory because Jesus, as he progresses toward Jerusalem, toward the cross, once more will appear in glory. It will not be the glory of Mount Tabor, but of Calvary. It will be the glory of the crucified God-man, Jesus Christ.

In the darkest of darkneses, in overwhelming sorrow, surrounded by the dregs of human sin, love speaks: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46).

God's glory shines even here, even on the cross. Thus on the Second Sunday of Lent, we are given a vision of the Easter resurrection, a vision of the glorified body of Our Lord.

The goal is not to stay here. Instead, we receive this vision so that we may enter the darkness of the human condition, the places where death and sorrow seem totalizing, and recognize the glimmering light of love. The glimmering light of Jesus Christ.

The goal of the Christian life is not to receive a totalizing vision that erases all darkness. Instead, it is to receive a

vision of a love that conquers death so that we can begin to glimpse the presence of hope even in sorrow.

In essence, that's the program of Lent. To attune our eyes to the luminosity of love made possible through Jesus.

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