

# The Transfiguration of our Lord

## Homily-Reflection

Given on August 6, 2017

The Transfiguration of our Lord is one of the most exciting and wonderful feasts. It's a celebration of the day when Jesus Christ showed who He really was. This is why it's one of the "Twelve Great Feasts" of the Byzantine Church.

A. What do the Scriptures teach us about this feast?

In today's Apostolic Reading we hear St. Peter giving us his first-hand testimony of the Transfiguration. The Apostles witnessed these things with their own eyes and testified to their truthfulness with their own lives. St. Peter states, "[we] were eyewitnesses of His majesty... [and] we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the Holy Mountain."

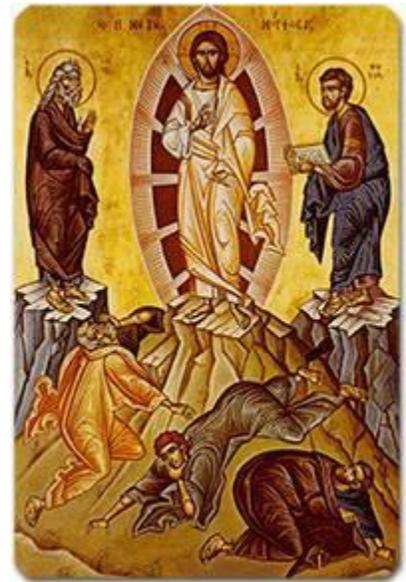
To understand the Transfiguration, we must understand who Jesus Christ is [According to St. Cyril of Alexandria]: Jesus is the "Son of God" who became the "Son of Mary." This is known as the INCARNATION –when the Son of God put on our human flesh and took upon Himself our complete human nature.

St. Gregory the Theologian once said, "Whatever is not assumed is not healed." Therefore God the Son became everything that we are, in order to heal us completely.

Jesus didn't come to impress people with wonders. He came to save people through His life, death and resurrection. He came to free us from the power of sin & death over us.

But in order to strengthen His Apostles for the horror they were going to witness in His passion, agony and death, Jesus led the three preeminent Apostles (Peter, James & John) up Mount Tabor and allowed them, for that short moment, to witness the glorious and blinding light of His Divinity shining forth through His humanity.

The Apostles' reaction at this astounding event is shown in the icon of the Transfiguration (on the tetra-pod before me). They instantly dropped to their knees! Just before, Peter had asked if



He could make "three booths," one to honor each of the great religious leaders: Jesus, along with Moses and Elijah (who had appeared there with Him).

As the words were still being formed in Peter's mouth, Jesus allowed His Divinity to shine forth and a voice from heaven came saying, "THIS is my beloved Son... [and added] Listen to HIM!" This message was not just for the Apostles but for the entire world.

At that moment, our Lord was showing them (and us), that He is not just another religious leader. Moses and Elijah didn't appear there to say, "Jesus is a great leader like us." Instead they were there to witness that JESUS is THE ONE to whom the Law (represented by Moses) and the Prophets (represented by Elijah) point to. CHRIST is THE ONE to whom all the living (represented by Elijah who never died) and the dead (represented by Moses who died) all point to.

In other words EVERYTHING in God's revelation points to Jesus: as (1) His Christ and (2) our Savior!

#### B. Theological Impact of this Feast

But what does Transfiguration mean for us?

Looking at the icon, you might be surprised to learn it's title in Greek is: "METAMORPHOSIS." Why is this? A metamorphosis is a complete transformation of something that essentially remains the same being

I was blessed to undergo theological & pastoral studies with the Antiochians. Theology, ultimately, is knowledge of God. I learned there that although our Byzantine Theology is very sophisticated, it's also very practical. In fact, our program was titled "Applied Orthodox Theology" because they drilled into our heads that theology that remains in the abstract -if it cannot be understood or applied to our lives- is worthless.

Today's feast brings to mind some big theological words like: Transfiguration, Metamorphosis, Theosis & Deification. But these words & concepts have very practical applications to our lives as Christians -as do all the Church's feasts.

Besides our Lord showing us who He truly was: the Divine Only-begotten Son of God... this feast also tells us something about God's plan for each one of us. We are ALL called to be Transfigured.

Today many people are confused; many seek transformation into a new mode of life (including some modes and lifestyles that are very unnatural, sinful and hurtful). Perhaps they are just seeking the real transformation that only God can offer? We are all called to be transfigured, through God's divine power, from a life of sin, to a life of grace. Our sins disfigure. God's grace Transfigures!

This simple truth is conveyed even in our iconography. Look at any icon: What do you see around each saint's head? A halo. What is a halo? It's not a golden ring showing how angelic a person was. It's God's divine LIGHT and LIFE shining and radiating through that person.

It's a sign that this person was transfigured and allowed God's light to shine through them. Just as our Lord said, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father" (Mt. 5:16).

Now "Theosis" is simply a Greek word which explains how we are saved: "Theos" means God & "henosis" means union. So, in our Byzantine understanding, we are saved by being united with God. It's as simple as that. To be saved we must be united to God

In other words, it's not our good works that save us. If that were the case, we wouldn't need Christ. Instead, it's our "Theosis," our union with God, that saves us. It's "putting on Christ" as my son Basil did today in Baptism. It's conforming our lives to Christ. It's "working out our salvation," as St. Paul said, "with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12). It's living a life of humble repentance, trust & communion with God.

### C. Basil's Baptism & Transfiguration

Today we have a new member of the Church:

Basil Paul Silouan Theodore Der-Ghazarian.

According to St. Paul, in Baptism we die and rise with Christ -sacramentally (Rom 6:4). The sins and transgressions we are conceived & born in (as it states in Psalm 50) are put to death as we are plunged into the water. And we are born anew as we arise out of the water & are joined to Christ through the power of His Resurrection!

Baptism gives each one of us the important first sacramental seeds of our Transfiguration. What we do with these depends a lot on our upbringing at home and our involvement in God's Church -which we were Baptized into.

If we are brought to Church each week and allowed to learn & grow in our faith, if we are allowed to experience the power of God through His Holy Sacraments, if faith in Christ is taught & lived out in our homes (all of which we parents & godparents promise to God at Holy Baptism) -then Transfiguration will take place in them.

But many Catholics today don't get this. They are sacramentalized, some are even catechized but they never are EVANGELIZED. They are never encouraged to develop a personal faith and relationship with Jesus Christ, God His Father and His Holy Spirit. Therefore transfiguration doesn't take place.

Christianity is all about a transformative relationship: A transformative relationship with God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

According to the Book of Revelation, Jesus stands at the door of our hearts and knocks, but He won't kick that door down. We have to open our hearts to Him... and let Him in. Only then can the transformation and participation in His divine life take place -as He wants for ALL His children.

I pray this transformation, this Transfiguration, not only for my son Basil & all my kids, but for every member of God's Church! Let's use the little time we have here to grow in our love for our Lord.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

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