

THE RADIANCE OF GOD

Daniel 7. 9-10, 13-14

2 Peter 1. 16-19

Luke 9. 28-36

I speak to you in the name of † the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

The scripture lessons from the Old and New Testaments this morning are like bookends. At one end of the bookshelf, we have Moses going up on Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. When he came down, having been in the presence of God, his face shone so brightly that the people of Israel had to cover their eyes. At the other end of the bookshelf, we have our Lord going up another mountain, Mount Hermon. As St Luke writes, ‘the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white’ (9. 29).

I would like to take a closer look at this second story, the transfiguration of Jesus; and in particular, I would like to invite you to think about the radiance of God. What was it about being in the presence of God that then became so apparent to others – the Israelites out in wilderness, and the disciples up on Mount Hermon? Have you ever seen such radiance as this in the faces of people you’ve known over the years? And finally, to what extent is the radiance of God visible in our lives today?

The story begins, ‘Now about eight days after these sayings, Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray’ (9. 28). In the Bible, mountains are synonymous with the majesty and dominion of God. God gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai (Ex 19-20). Abraham offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God on Mount Moriah (Gen 22). The prophet Elijah challenged the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18). The Temple was constructed on Mount Zion; and Christ was crucified on Mount Calvary and

ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives. Even now, it is common for those who want to get in touch with the nearness of God to go to the mountains.

Well, our Lord took Peter, James and John up on the mountain to pray, and as he prayed, ‘the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white’ (9. 29). Clearly, Jesus was bathed in the light of God’s presence.

Let’s think about that for just a moment. We have just heard the story of Moses up on Mount Sinai; and now, here is Christ on Mount Hermon. What is it about being in the presence of God that becomes so apparent to others?

In Christian art, have you noticed that saints are often depicted with a disk-like golden circle behind their faces? While this looks a little one-dimensional compared to the computer-generated graphics we have become so accustomed to today, these golden circles are meant to represent the saints’ holiness. The golden circles also reveal a quality we tend to overlook, that those who have walked with God *literally glow* with the radiance of his presence.

Elsewhere in the Bible we read, ‘Those who are wise shall *shine* like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever’ (Dan 12. 3).

And in the Gospel of St Matthew our Lord told his disciples, ‘...the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father’ (Mt 13. 43).

Throughout the scriptures, light is a symbol of God, so that whenever we come into the presence of God, we are filled with his light and with the light of his love; and like a prism, the radiance of God is reflected and refracted through us to illumine and enlighten others.

There is a difference, however, between the radiance that was apparent on Moses's face and the radiance of our Lord's appearance. Whilst the change in Jesus's appearance reflected the fact that he was experiencing God's glory (as Moses did), this change was chiefly due to the fact that Christ was temporarily revealing *his own glory* (9. 32), which is exactly like the glory of God.

As our Lord prayed, he was joined by none other than Moses and Elijah. They represent, of course, the Law and the Prophets of the Jewish faith; and their appearance serves to further validate the identity of Jesus. The risen Christ will later assert that Moses and the prophets pointed towards him (Lk 24. 25-27, 44-46); and Luke tells us in our scene that Moses and Elijah 'were speaking of our Lord's departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem', surely referring to Jesus's forthcoming death and resurrection, both predicted by the scriptures.

And then a cloud covered the mountaintop, and a voice came from the cloud saying, 'This is my Son, my Chosen. Listen to him!' (9. 35). If ever there was any question as to who Christ was, there was no mystery about it now: he is the Messiah, the only begotten Son of God.

When you get a moment (and I am not talking about doing it first thing in the morning, when you have just awakened), take a close look in the mirror. Does the radiance of God sparkle in your eyes? Does your face glow with the light of Christ? Know this: The closer we walk with God, the brighter our faces will be.

Lest any of us become discouraged over the fact that we are not reflecting God's light enough and are not terribly radiant, I would like to remind us of a very important truth.

In St Paul's second epistle to the church in Corinth, he writes to Christians and assures them that they are living in an age when the ministry of the Holy Spirit is nothing short of glorious. This age has continued until the present day. Paul writes, 'Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though *reflected in a mirror*, are *being transformed* into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit' (3. 17-18).

The word that Paul uses for 'transformed' in Greek is the *exact same word* that is used in our text from Mark to describe our Lord's transfiguration. Just as Jesus underwent a metamorphosis on the mountaintop, so are you and I to be fundamentally changed in the valley where we are.

I wonder, how does this transformation happen? Well, it occurs as we keep our eyes on Christ.

All of us know what it is to stand in front of a mirror, and to see the reflection of ourselves in that mirror. In order to *reflect* something, we must stand *in front of* something. The crucial message of Paul's letter to the Corinthians is that as we stand (figuratively and prayerfully) in front of our Lord – who is the radiance of God's glory and who is the exact representation of his being – and as we keep our eyes on him, we will reflect his glory and be transformed.

For the truth is, *we become what we behold*. Today, I wonder: who, or what are you and I beholding? And what kind of a mirror are we? Amen.