



**Orthodox Mission of the
Entrance of the Theotokos
into the Temple**

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Transfiguration
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became white as light. (Matthew 17:2)

We rarely get to know people how they actually are. We see them, interact with them, speak with them. But rarely do we really know what actually makes a person tick. The Greeks had a word for this. They called it “persona.” We present ourselves with a particular “persona.” Sometimes a person’s “persona” is carefully constructed, as with politicians and other people in the public eye. But whether we craft it or not, we only allow people to see a little bit of who we actually are. The rest we typically hide behind our exterior, our “persona.”

The seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew from which our Gospel lesson for the Feast of the Transfiguration comes shows clearly who Jesus is. The curtain of his “persona,” whatever that might have been like, was absolutely drawn aside. I am not speaking specifically about the glorious manifestation of His divinity in our lesson, but also and most particularly about what came before. Only a few verses earlier in the same chapter He made it very clear to His disciples that He would suffer at the hands of the chief priests, the scribes and other elders at the Temple, that He would be put to death, and be raised to life on the third day. St. Matthew reports that the apostle Peter took Jesus aside and

rebuked Him! Peter was evidently horrified at what Jesus said, apparently not hearing or understanding the part about His resurrection on the third day. It was too much for him to hear of His Lord's suffering and death. In return, Jesus rebuked him, saying those unforgettable words, "Get behind me Satan ..., for your thoughts are the thoughts of men ... not God's."

Shortly thereafter, Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him up to a high mountain, just as Moses had been taken up to the top of Mount Sinai. There, the revelation, the inner essence of our Lord was complete. The One who would become the man of the cross, was overshadowed by a cloud, even as Moses was overshadowed by a cloud in the presence of the Father. The two greatest prophets of Israel, Moses and Elijah, appear there as well, and our Lord shown with the light of the Godhead Itself, St. Matthew says, as bright as the sun. Unable to withstand the uncreated light, they fell to the ground. And the vision was complete with Jesus lifting them up from the earth and telling them not to speak of it until after His resurrection.

Never in any other place in all of scripture was there such a vibrant conjoining of two radical antitheses: suffering and death on the one hand; glory, light and life on the other. This is the inner essence of God. Like so many people we hunger for the vision, the experience of His glory. But in this lesson, we learn that the essence of His glory is that which we turn away from – self-giving, voluntary suffering and death, bearing of the agony and despair of the sin of the world. At the time it was incomprehensible to the holy apostles just as it is often incomprehensible to us. So many people struggle to find meaning and purpose in lives that they consider to be without meaning or purpose. How sad it is for such people not to realize that it is the sacrifices and self-giving of each and every moment that they could find the meaning and purpose they lack.

Brothers and Sisters: It is in our sacrifices, our self-giving, that we become most like God Himself. Just as He allowed the uncreated light of His glory to be discerned at the same time that He announced His voluntary suffering and death, we too will find our purpose in self-giving and voluntary service to others. We do not need to be dramatic or well-known in our service. We need only emulate what our Lord has shown us. This we can do in everyday lives of charity and care for others. We need only drop our external "personas" enough to allow ourselves the grace to give, to love, to support, to serve.

Above all, remember how the story in our lesson ends! In the blinding light of His divinity, the apostles had fallen on their faces before Him. But it was He, the Lord Jesus Christ, that raised them up again, even as He will raise each of us up in the resurrection of the dead. As we confess in the Creed each and every Sunday, we will live with Him in that Kingdom that will have no end. His is an everlasting Kingdom, the essence of which is service, care for one another, inspired, enlivened, and guided by the light of His own presence. It will sustain us eternally. This is what the Transfiguration shows us: the glory of God is precisely in that which we consider not glorious at all: sacrifice, love and service to others in His Name.

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