

'Tis Good Lord, to be Here

Matthew 17:1-9

Today is the celebration of the Transfiguration of our Lord. This is the last Sunday of the Epiphany Season. This joyous season of light and revelation is about to give way to the penitential season of Lent. Today is the last day that we sing "Alleluia" until our celebration of the resurrection of our Lord on Easter morning.

Just as our Lord spent 40 days in somber solitude in the wilderness being tempted by the devil, beginning on Ash Wednesday, we will spend the 40 days of Lent in repentance of our sins – pondering the humiliation, suffering, and death of Christ in humble devotion to our Lord.

But today is not yet Lent. Today is a day to celebrate. The Transfiguration of our Lord is a most magnificent event. Christ allows three of His disciples to see Him in all His glory. Peter has already confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. They had seen the miracles. They had seen the words of the prophets fulfilled in this Man called Jesus. Their faith was there – even though there have been struggles and they will continue to struggle with their faith. But now, on that mountain, Christ's glory

was no longer hidden under the form of flesh and blood.

His radiance was no longer suppressed. He no longer cast a shadow. There He stood, beaming forth like the sun; standing there in the presence of the saints – Moses and Elijah. And as if this were not enough, the greatest display of heavenly power ever seen on earth, then a bright cloud envelops them and God the Father says to the disciples the same words that He spoke at the beginning of Christ's ministry: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Those words were first spoken at Jesus' Baptism in the presence of John the Baptist and those listening to John. We know that Peter's brother Andrew was one of John the Baptist's disciples before being called to follow Christ.

Perhaps Andrew heard the voice himself and had told Peter of the voice from heaven. Even if that is not the case, the details of Jesus' Baptism were not unknown to the disciples. For more than three years, Peter had probably longed to also hear His Father speak. Peter was enjoying the event so much that he wanted to build three shelters so Moses and Elijah could stay a while. He didn't want the glory to fade. He got a little glimpse of heaven and didn't want to come back down the mountain.

Can you blame him? St. Paul was given a vision of heaven and later wrote, "I desire to [die and] be with Christ which is better by far."

We understand why Peter said, “Tis good Lord to be here.”

But after this most blessed event, Christ once again suppressed His glory and only exposed His flesh and blood. Coming down the mountain, He cast a shadow once again. This is a great mystery as to how the fullness of the Almighty, Eternal God can be present in the Man Jesus Christ – such great power seen in such humble form.

I believe this gives us a little insight into our own experience with the flesh and blood of Christ. The people in Jesus’ day saw the One, True Almighty Eternal God standing before them in the form of a man; being fully true man, and other than possessing a sinful nature, having all of our human frailties. Other than on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus appeared to be just a man. But hidden underneath that human appearance was the fullness of God, the radiance of God waiting to beam forth.

We spent some time on this very topic last Sunday in our Bible class as we are studying the letter to the Hebrews. Jesus has the full authority of God, because He never stops being God. But He has humbled Himself and made Himself a servant of us all. He is above us; He is greater than us; yet He came to serve.

Our life of faith is filled with these paradoxes (where two things seem to oppose each other, yet are both true). We have a similar experience with the flesh and blood of our Lord. The fullness of

Christ comes to us in the most humble of forms. Christ comes to us under the form of bread and wine – or as Luther rightly says: “Christ’s body and blood are present in, with, and under the form of bread and wine.”

It looks and tastes like bread and wine because it is bread and wine. Yet Jesus says, “This is my body. . . This is My blood” given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

What we receive in Holy Communion is like what Peter, James, and John witnessed on the mountain. What seemed an ordinary, everyday form of the man Jesus was transformed, was transfigured, so that the power of God (which was always there, but was hidden) was revealed to those who were there.

In the Sacrament, Christ is hidden under those simple forms of bread and wine. But what power there is in that greatest of food. Through the power of the Word, Christ is present in that bread and wine, and He fills us with blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Today, in God’s House, kneeling in the presence of Christ, witnessing His power in the Sacrament of the Altar, we can also say, “Tis good Lord to be here.” Amen.