

FOLLOW ME

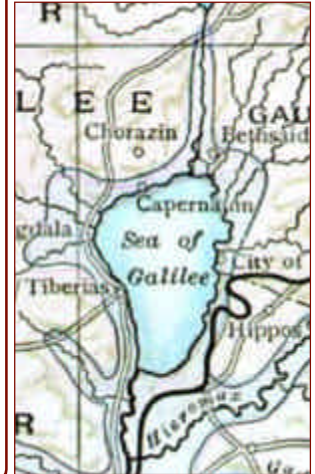
LESSON TWELVE: THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK 9



FAST FACTS

- Jesus was Transfigured on a high mountain, where He talked with Moses and Elijah. This was witnessed by Ss. Peter, James, and John.
- The return of Elijah was fulfilled by St. John the Baptist.
- Jesus healed a young man possessed by a demon.
- Jesus prophesied for a second time His coming Passion.
- Those who are called to lead should serve others.
- Jesus said regarding those who exorcised demons in His name, but did not directly follow Him, "He who is not against us is for us."
- Jesus taught that we should remove from our lives anything that causes us to sin.

MAP



MARK 9:1-8

The Transfiguration of Christ is one of the central events recorded in Scripture, and thus is recorded in the first three Gospels (see Matthew 17:1-8 and Luke 9:28-36), and is referred to by St. John the Theologian in John 1:14. The Kontakion for the feast of Transfiguration explains to us that, by revealing His eternal glory to Ss.



Peter, John, and James, Jesus showed that He had the power to avoid the Passion predicted in Mark 8:31; the fact that He would not avoid the Passion proves that He wanted to fulfill His divine mission.

The Transfiguration is also a revelation of the Holy Trinity. St. Gregory Palamas wrote in the fourteenth century: "Both the Father and the Holy Spirit were invisibly with

the Lord, the one witnessing with his voice that this was his beloved Son, the other shining forth together with him through the luminous cloud and indicating the unified oneness of the light of the Son both with him and with the Father."

Jesus' Transfiguration was therefore also a revelation of the Kingdom of God (which He predicted in Mark 9:1 that some of the Disciples would see before they died). The Disciples received a vision of God's transfor-

IT'S IN THE BIBLE...

Why did Moses and Elijah appear at the Transfiguration? It is generally understood by biblical interpreters that Moses represented the Law (see Exodus 24:12), and Elijah the Prophets (see 1 Kings 17:1), therefore showing that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets.

The Holy Apostle Peter's desire to build tabernacles (booths of intertwined branches) for the three holy men probably means that St. Peter was ready to celebrate *Sukkot*, the Jewish feast of Tabernacles commemorating the Israelites' journey through the wilderness, and celebrating the annual harvest of crops (Leviticus 23:33-43).

OUR FAITH TEACHES

The Church Fathers point out that the Transfiguration occurred as Jesus prayed (Luke 9:28-29). Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow explains how this applies to us:

Pray, Christian, fervently and with the whole might of thy soul, pray diligently and perseveringly, pray rightly and purely; and if thou art not thyself equal to it, then pray for prayer itself, and by prayer thou wilt first obtain true and effectual prayer, and then this prayer shall overcome all things with thee and obtain all things for thee; it will guide thee unto Mount Tabor or create a Tabor within thee; it will call thy soul into heaven.

mation of all creation. Archbishop Dmitri Royster explains: "In the dazzling light, in which the very mountain and all the surroundings were altered, there is a glimpse of the transfigured world (cosmos), when God will be all in all, when the Kingdom is finally established."

MARK 9:14-32

Jesus again confronted a lack of faith among His followers. His Disciples were unable to exorcise a demon from a young man, and even the boy's father — who brought his son to Jesus — doubted whether Jesus had the ability to exorcise the demon. Jesus laments their faithlessness (vs. 19), comments that all things are possible to those who believe (vs. 23), and yet again experienced faithlessness in His Disciples when they still refused to accept that Jesus would die and rise again. All of these things point to the need to cry out with the father of the demonized boy, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief" (vs. 24)!

MARK 9:33-50

The *Orthodox Study Bible* titles the last third of this chapter "The Way of Discipleship" because in it Jesus described some of the attributes needed in a whole-hearted follower of Christ.

Jesus first taught the Disciples that they must avoid pride and greed in their lives. Rather than fulfilling their calling as disciples so that they could receive status and recognition for their accomplishments, Christians should be like young children: innocent and unconcerned with things like status (vv. 33-37, 42). The *Shepherd of Hermas* explains: "Thy are as veritable infants, whose hearts do not invent evil, who hardly know what corruption is, and who have remained childlike forever. People such as these, therefore, undoubtedly dwell in the kingdom of God,



OUR FAITH TEACHES

Do Orthodox Christians believe that people will forever be tormented in literal, physical fire and brimstone? There are certainly some Christians who believe that those who reject God will spend eternity burning in a fiery hell. Traditionally, however, the Orthodox Church teaches a different understanding of the fire and torment.

St. John of Damascus writes, "Sinners will be given over to everlasting fire, which will not be a material fire such as we are accustomed to, but a fire such as God might know." St. John's teaching can be better understood by looking at two biblical references to fire and light in relation to God. Holy Scripture describes God's presence as a "consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29) and an "unapproachable light" (1 Timothy 6:16) that delights those who love Him, but causes anguish and pain in those who do not "love His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8). Therefore, for those who love God, resurrection from the dead and the presence of God will be paradise. For those who hate God, however, resurrection from the dead and the presence of God will be hell.

because they in no way defile God's commandments."

Jesus next confronted the danger of sectarianism (a sect is a group that separates itself from all others, often viewing itself as good and all others as evil) when His Disciples were concerned that individuals who were not directly following Jesus were nonetheless able to exorcise demons in His name (which, ironically, the Disciples themselves had just been unable to do). Jesus simply responded, "He who is not against us is on our side" (vs. 42).

Jesus went on to explain that Christians should leave and avoid anything that tempts us to sin (vv. 43-48). He did not mean to literally dismember ourselves: instead, he used such shocking imagery to reinforce how thoroughly we should refuse to let anything come between God and us. He already said that Christians should not value their lives more than Him (see 8:35-36); later in this Gospel He will similarly warn that we should not love our possessions (10:21), or even our family (10:28), more than we love God.

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS?

- St. Luke adds a detail regarding Jesus' activity when the Transfiguration occurred. Do I follow His example?
- Do I pray the same thing as the father in verse 24: "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief?" What do I believe, and where do I need to grow?
- Am I concerned with status and power, or is my relationship with God like the children He praised in vv. 33-37?
- Are there things in my life that I need to "amputate" to draw closer to God?

